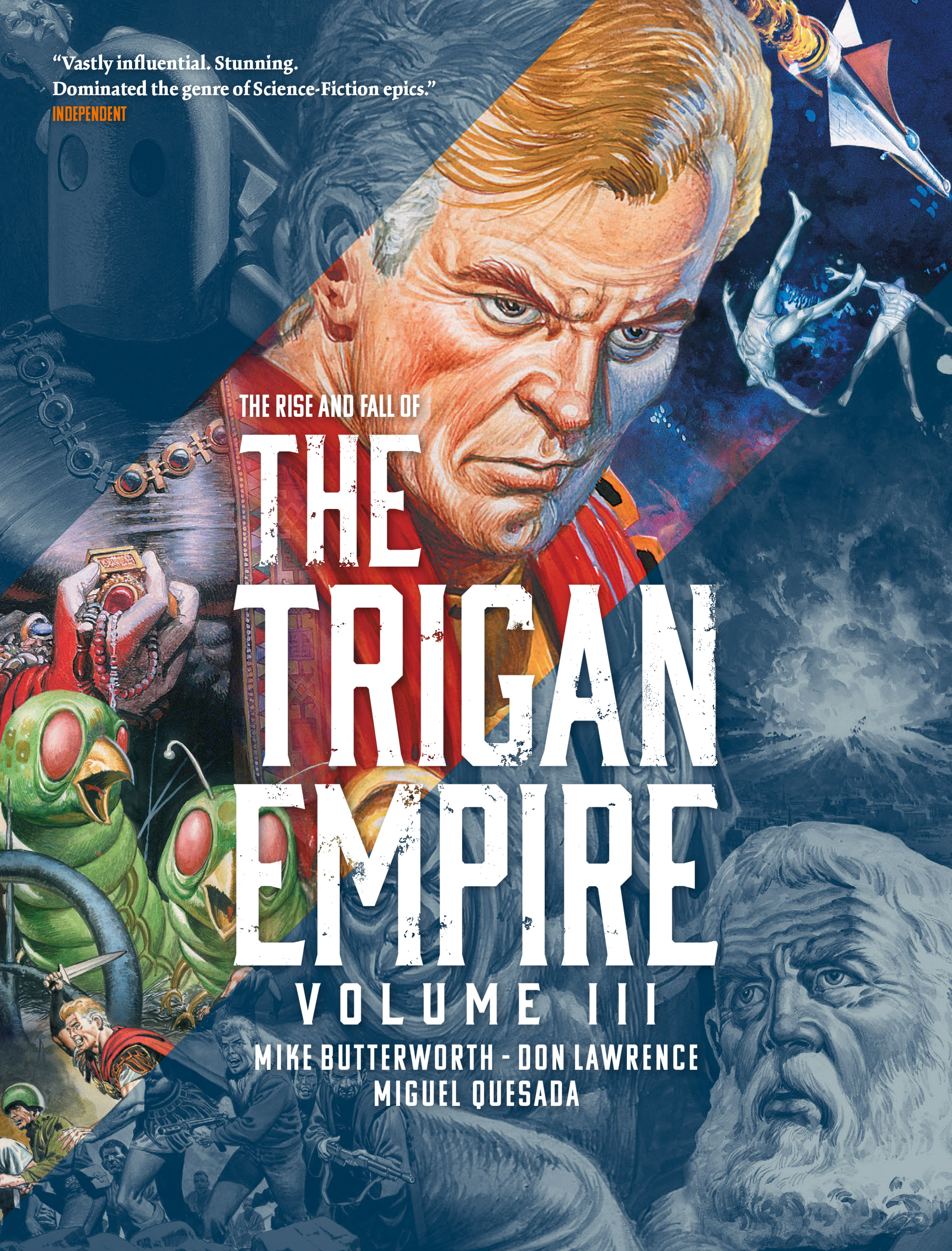
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THE RISE AND FALL OF

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

WRITER
MIKE BUTTERWORTH
ARTISTS
DON LAWRENCE
MIGUEL QUESADA

VOLUME III

XXV

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

THE MENACE FROM THE DEEP

Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 462-474

21st November 1970 – 6th February 1971

BY THE TIME THE RESCUE CRAFT ARRIVED, THE 'DAVELI' WAS NEARLY GONE!

THE EMPEROR TRIGO HIMSELF WATCHED THE VAST HULL GO TO THE GRAVE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA OF TIBOR.

WHY? HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?

AN IMPERIAL COURT OF ENQUIRY WAS SUMMONED A FEW DAYS LATER.

TELL US IN YOUR OWN WORDS, CAPTAIN... WHAT HAPPENED?

IMPERIAL MAJESTY, IT HAPPENED AT THE FIFTEENTH HOUR – A SHUDDER RAN THROUGH THE SHIP AS IF SHE HAD STRUCK A PROJECTING ROCK...

NO, SIR! IT WAS MORE LIKE AN UNDERWATER EXPLOSION!

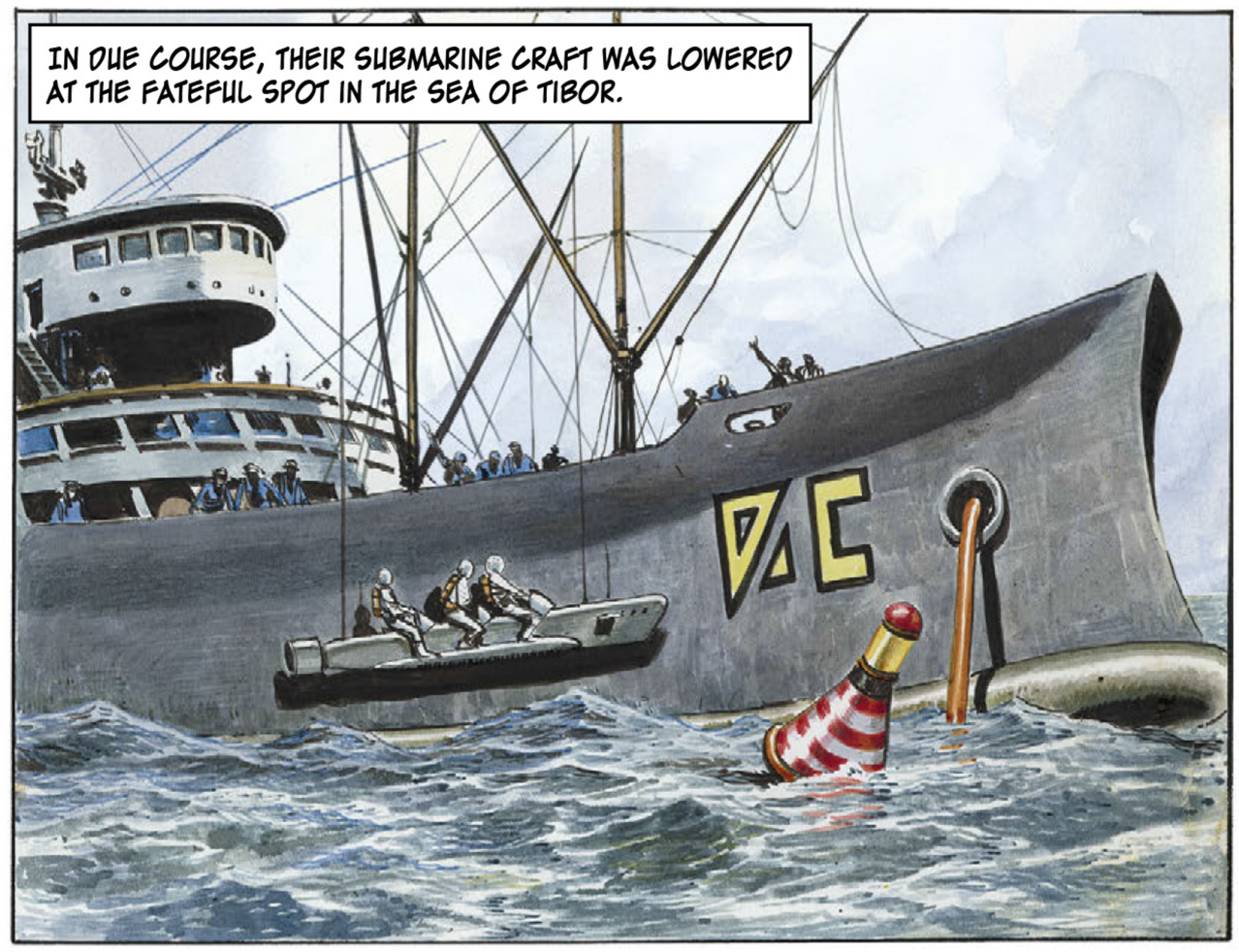
NOT AN EXPLOSION! IT FELT LIKE A MIGHTY BLOW!

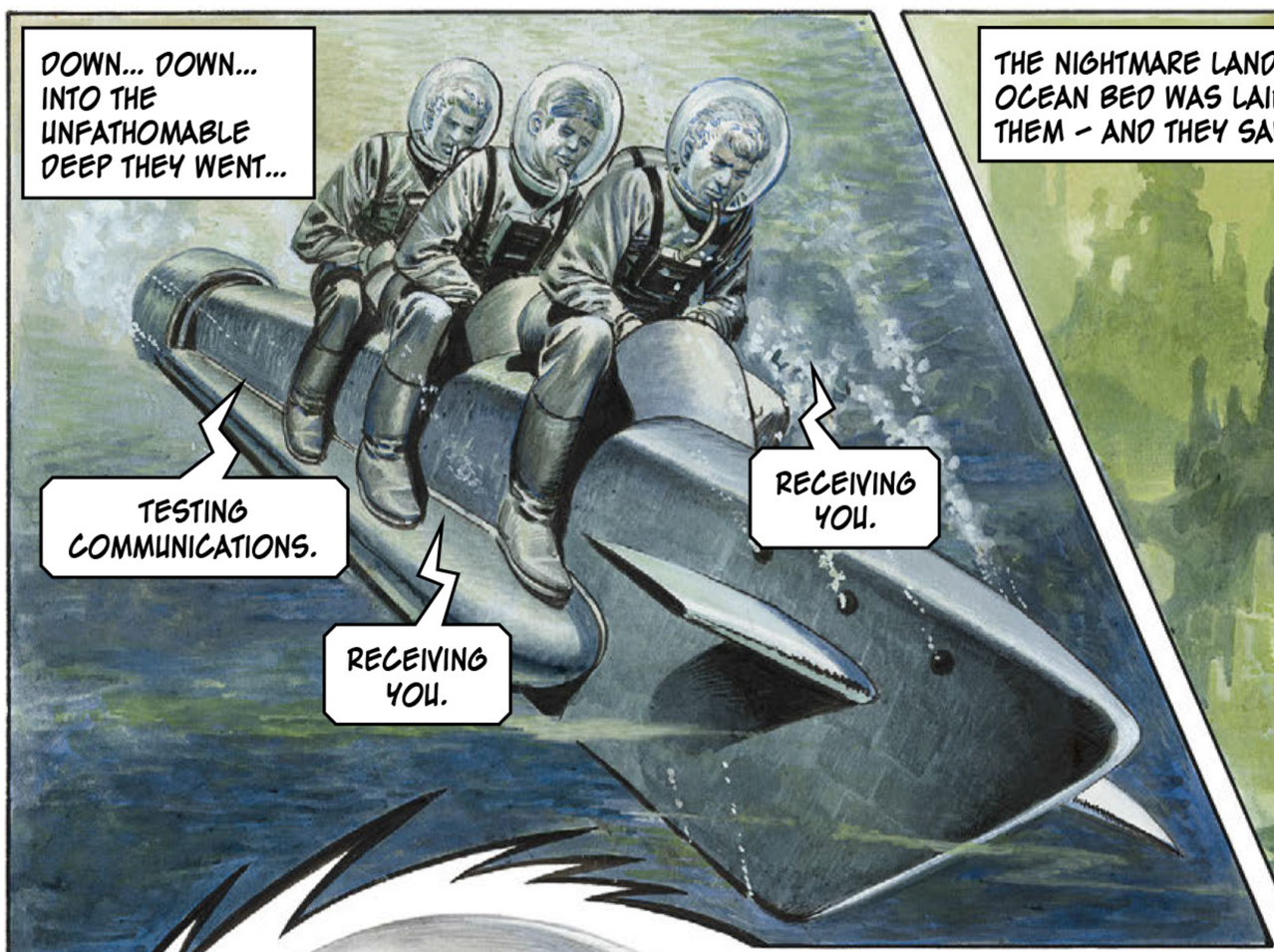
YOU WERE OFF-WATCH AND ASLEEP, WHILE I WAS ON THE BRIDGE!

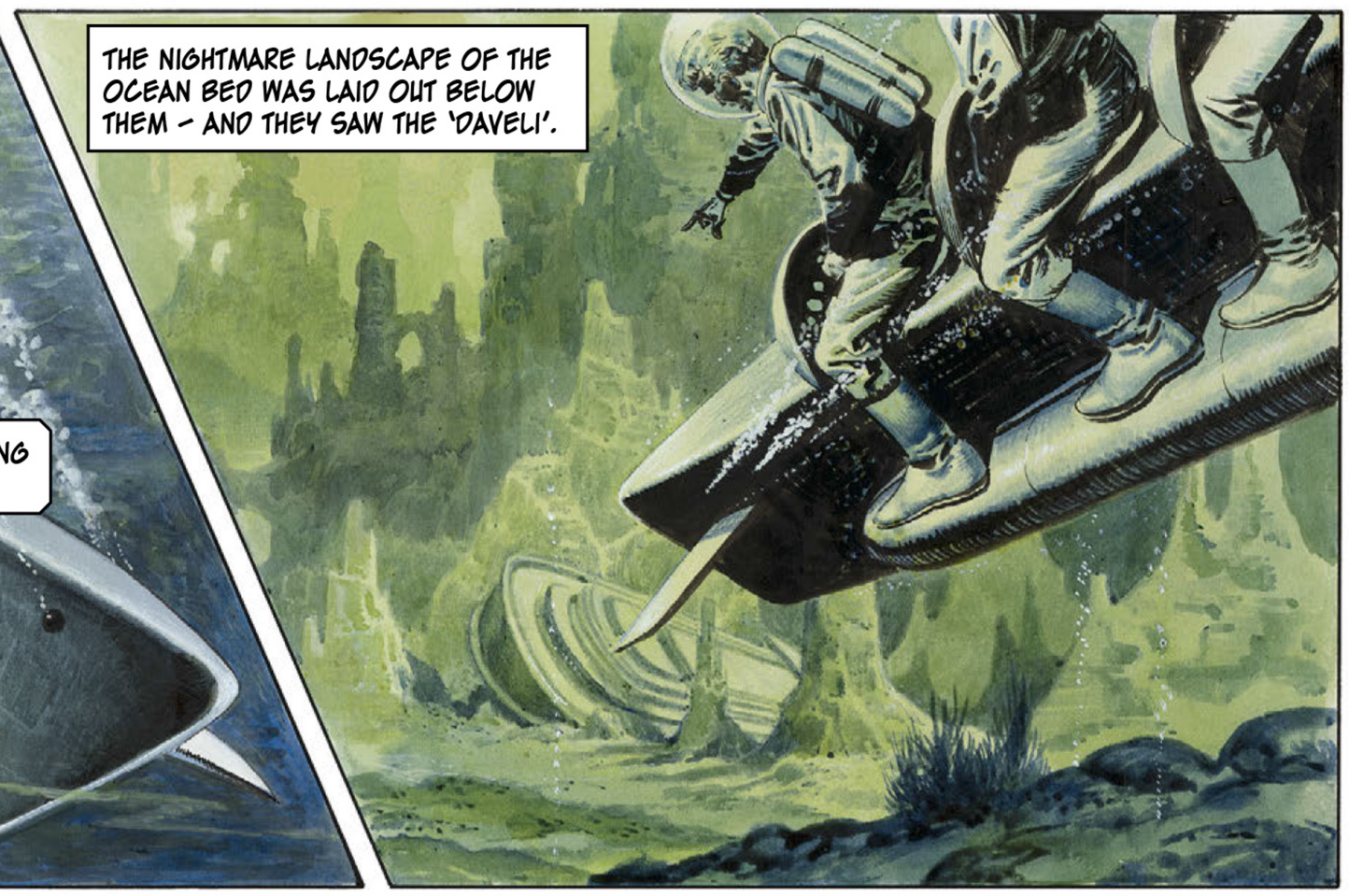
SILENCE! *SILENCE, I TELL YOU!*

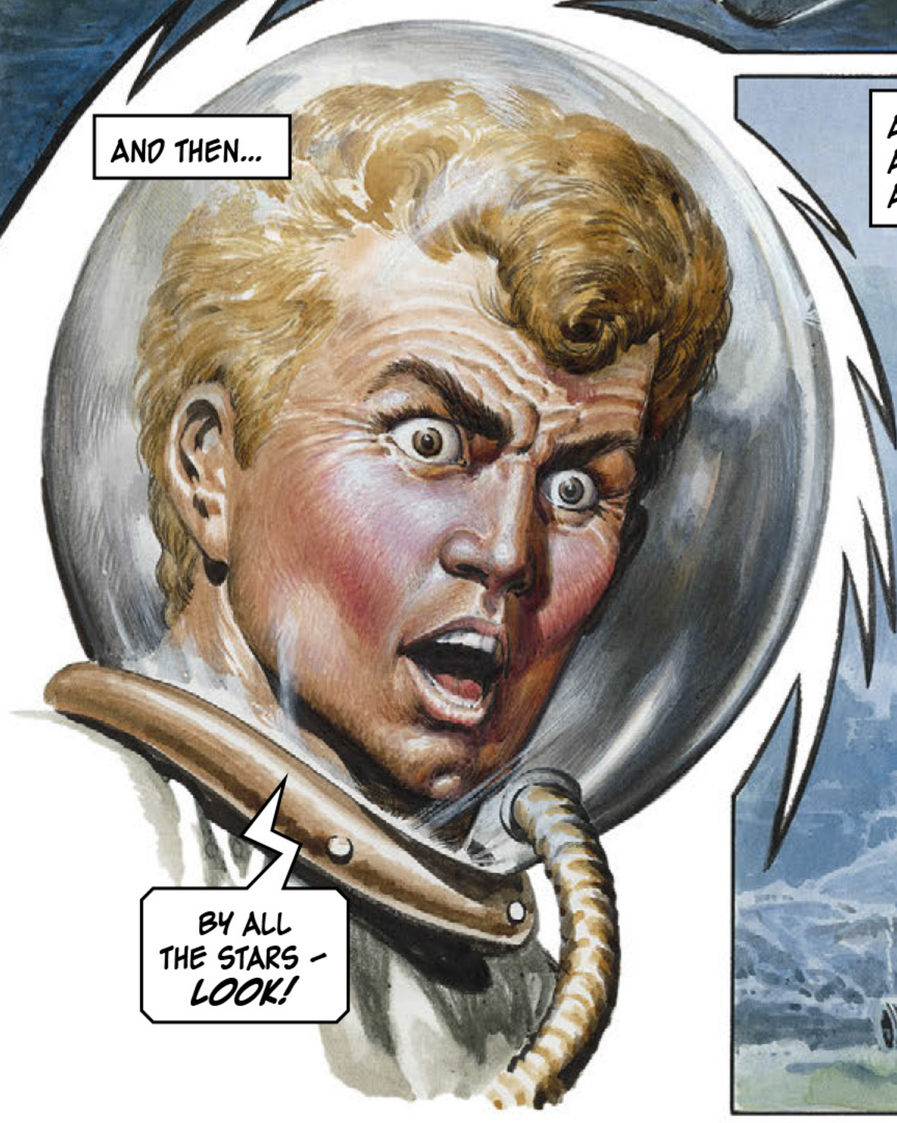
SINCE YOUR EVIDENCES DO NOT TALLY, THIS IMPERIAL COURT HAS NO OTHER COURSE BUT TO ORDER AN INSPECTION OF THE SUNKEN HULL OF THE 'DAVELI'.

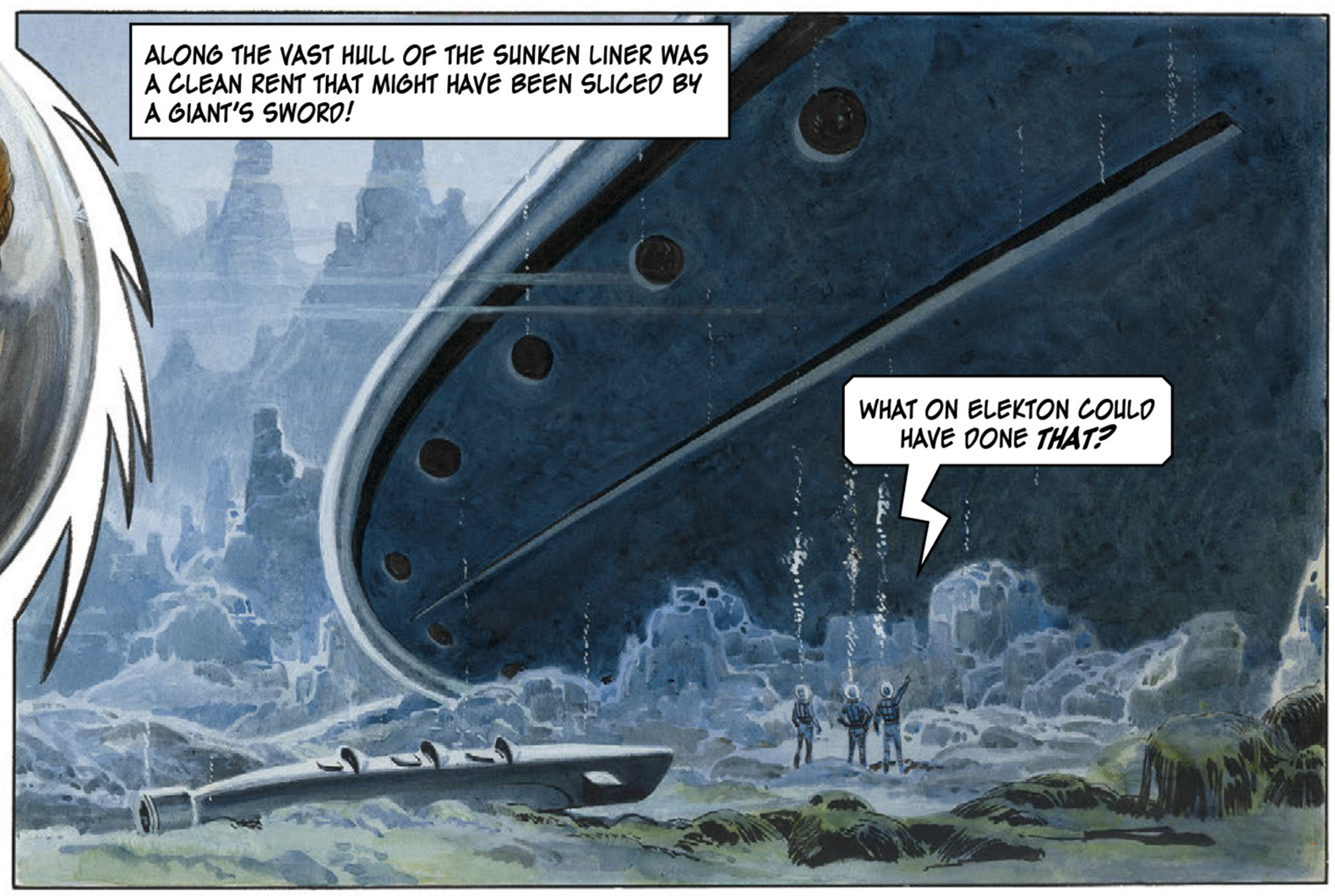
THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW, JANNO, AND HIS TWO COMRADES VOLUNTEERED FOR THE HAZARDOUS TASK OF DIVING TO THE WRECK. THEY WERE GIVEN SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS.
YOUR GEAR WILL PROTECT YOU FROM THE MASSIVE PRESSURES YOU WILL ENCOUNTER – BUT AT THAT PROFOUND DEPTH, THERE ARE MANY *UNKNOWN* HAZARDS!


IN DUE COURSE, THEIR SUBMARINE CRAFT WAS LOWERED AT THE FATEFUL SPOT IN THE SEA OF TIBOR.

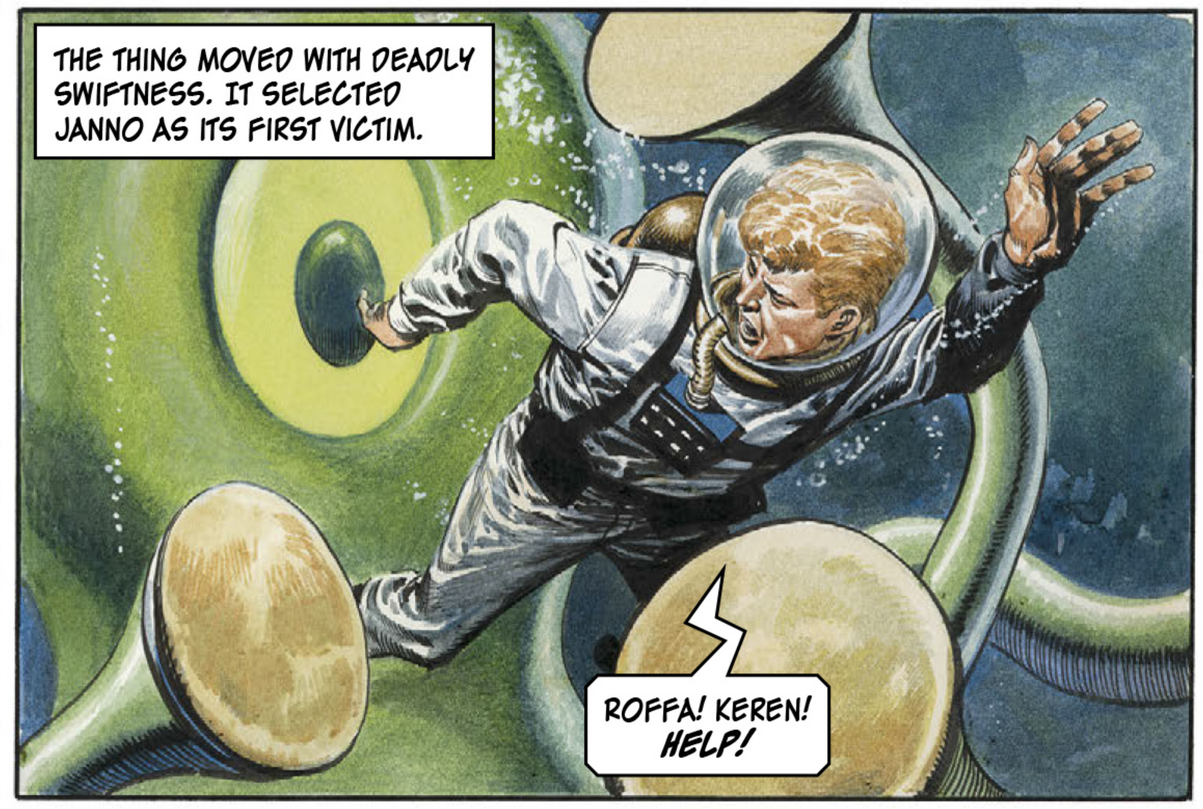

DOWN... DOWN... INTO THE UNFATHOMABLE DEEP THEY WENT...
TESTING COMMUNICATIONS.
RECEIVING YOU.
RECEIVING YOU.


THE NIGHTMARE LANDSCAPE OF THE OCEAN BED WAS LAID OUT BELOW THEM – AND THEY SAW THE 'DAVELI'.

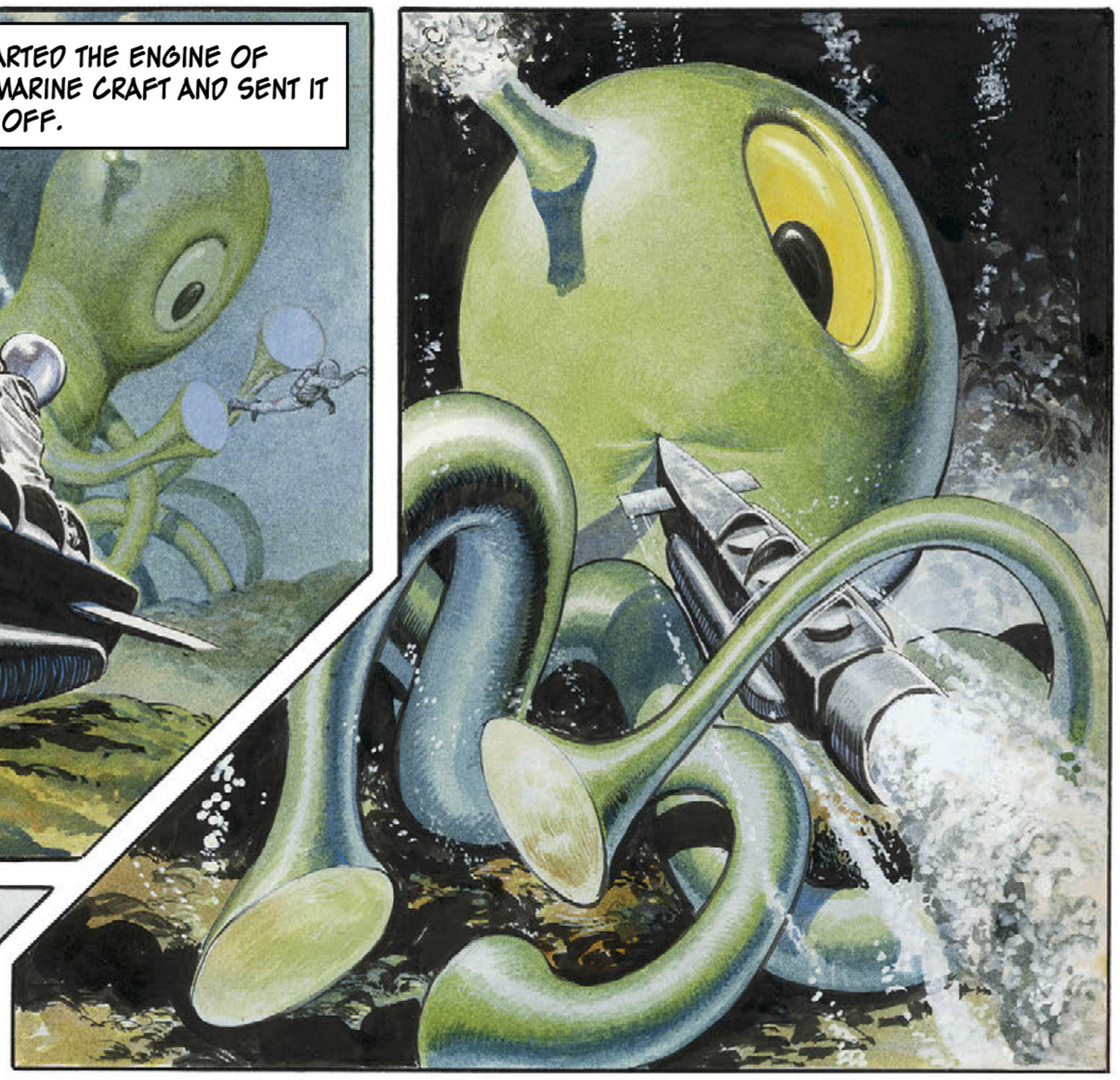

AND THEN...
BY ALL THE STARS – *LOOK!*

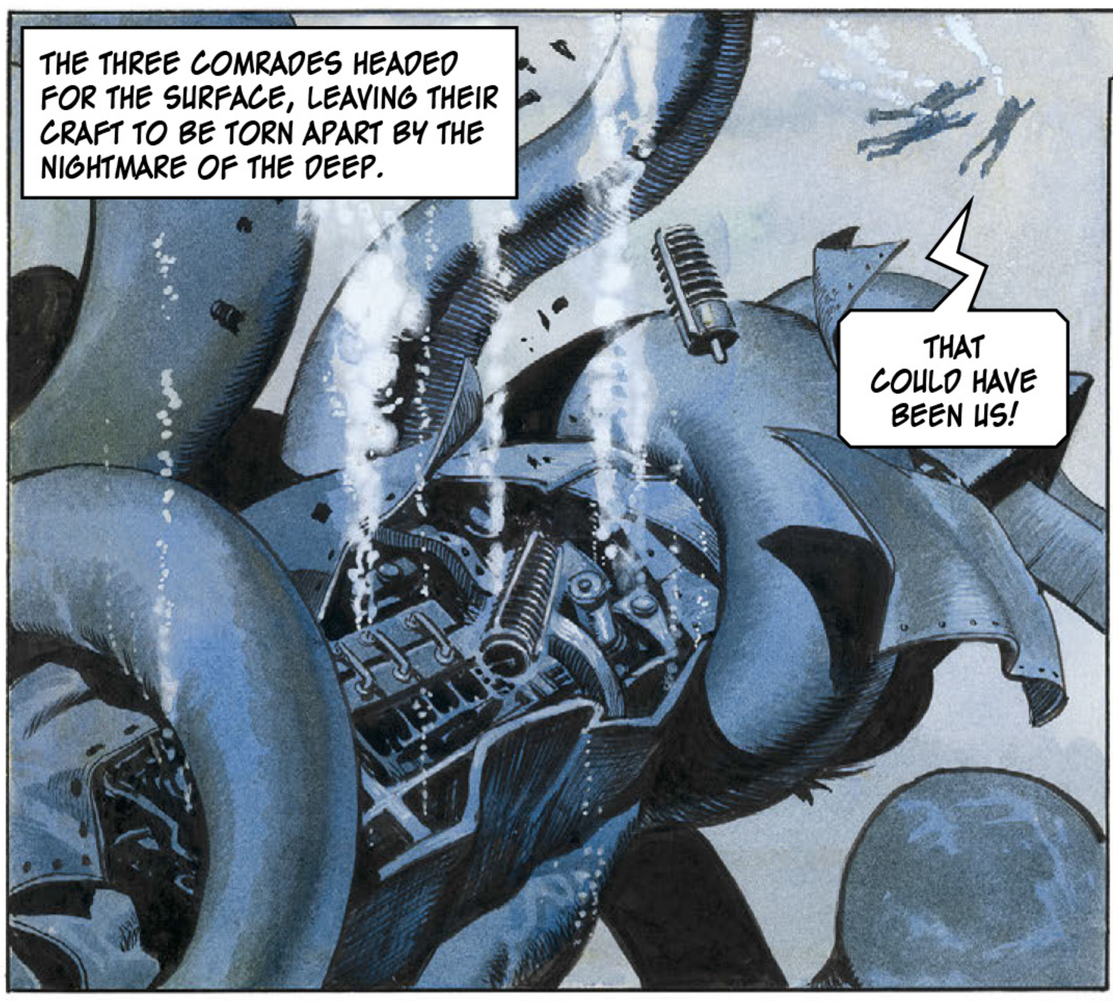

ALONG THE VAST HULL OF THE SUNKEN LINER WAS A CLEAN RENT THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN SLICED BY A GIANT'S SWORD!
WHAT ON ELEKTON COULD HAVE DONE *THAT?*

AND THEN... THEY SAW – IT!
BY ALL THE STARS... LOOK!

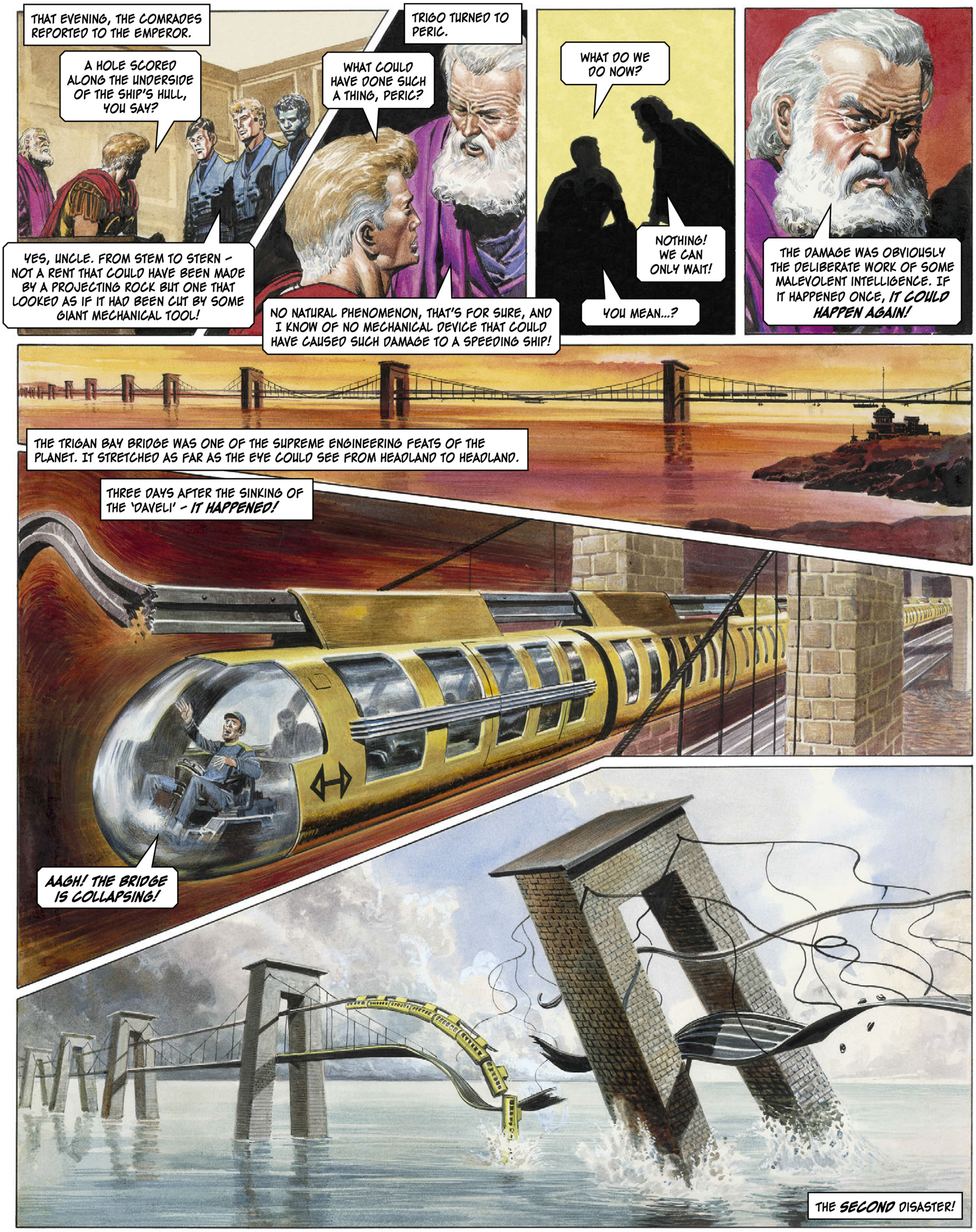

THE THING MOVED WITH DEADLY SWIFTNESS. IT SELECTED JANNO AS ITS FIRST VICTIM.
ROFFA! KEREN! HELP!

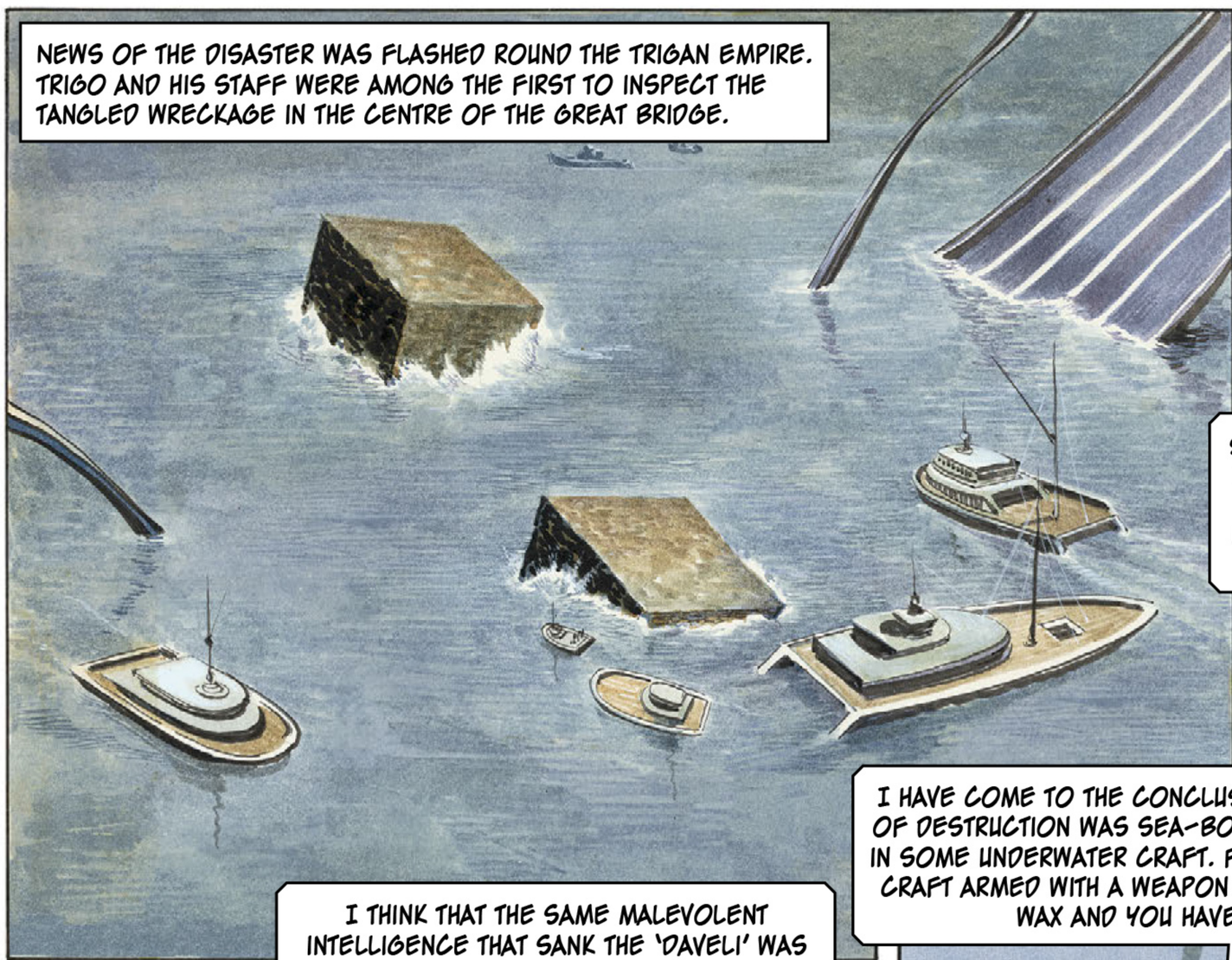
ROFFA STARTED THE ENGINE OF THEIR SUBMARINE CRAFT AND SENT IT SPEEDING OFF.

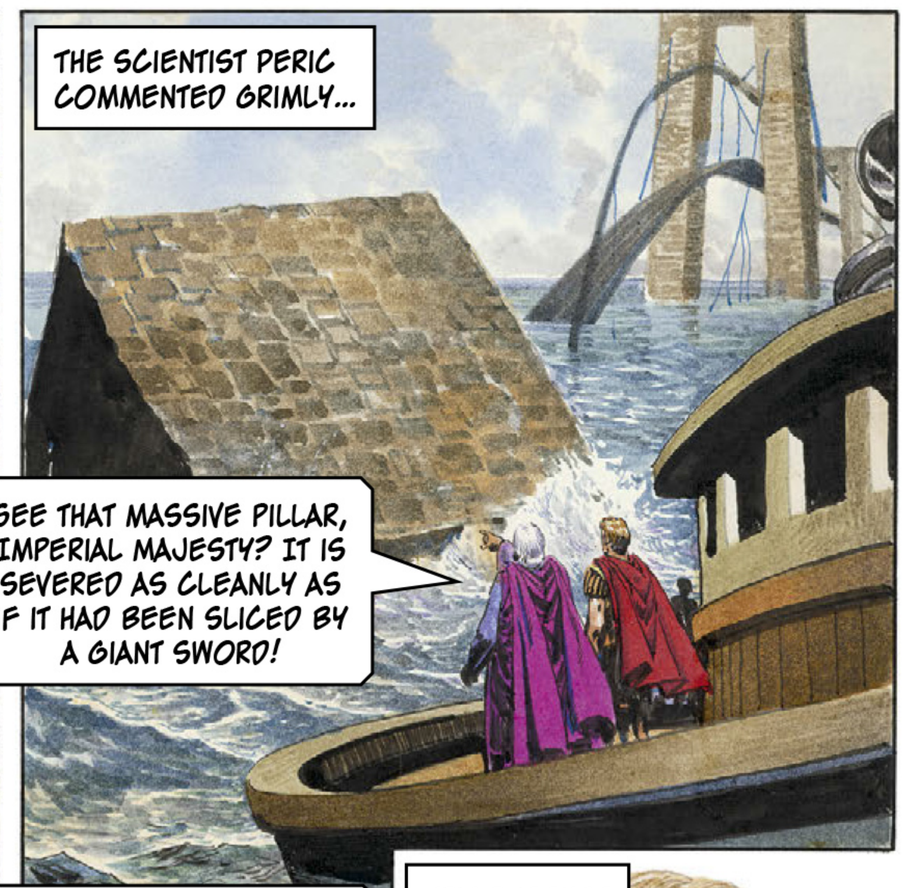



THE THREE COMRADES HEADED FOR THE SURFACE, LEAVING THEIR CRAFT TO BE TORN APART BY THE NIGHTMARE OF THE DEEP.
THAT COULD HAVE BEEN US!

THEY WERE SOON BEING HELPED ABOARD THE DIVING SHIP.
DID YOU FIND WHAT YOU WERE SEEKING?
YES! WE KNOW WHY THE 'DAVELI' SANK – BUT HOW IT COULD HAVE HAPPENED IS ANOTHER MATTER!

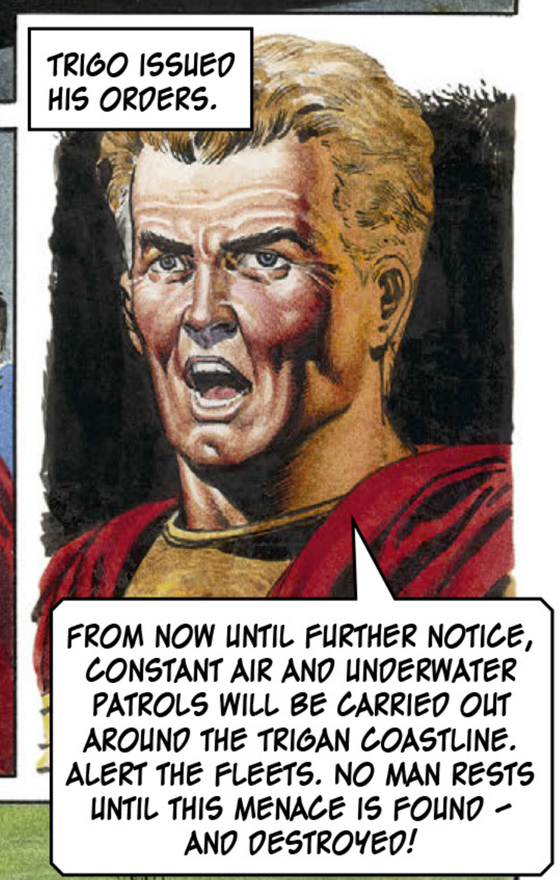

THAT EVENING, THE COMRADES REPORTED TO THE EMPEROR.
A HOLE SCORED ALONG THE UNDERSIDE OF THE SHIP'S HULL, YOU SAY?
YES, UNCLE. FROM STEM TO STERN – NOT A RENT THAT COULD HAVE BEEN MADE BY A PROJECTING ROCK BUT ONE THAT LOOKED AS IF IT HAD BEEN CUT BY SOME GIANT MECHANICAL TOOL!
TRIGO TURNED TO PERIC.
WHAT COULD HAVE DONE SUCH A THING, PERIC?
NO NATURAL PHENOMENON, THAT'S FOR SURE, AND I KNOW OF NO MECHANICAL DEVICE THAT COULD HAVE CAUSED SUCH DAMAGE TO A SPEEDING SHIP!
WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
NOTHING! WE CAN ONLY WAIT!
YOU MEAN...?
THE DAMAGE WAS OBVIOUSLY THE DELIBERATE WORK OF SOME MALEVOLENT INTELLIGENCE. IF IT HAPPENED ONCE, IT COULD HAPPEN AGAIN!
THE TRIGAN BAY BRIDGE WAS ONE OF THE SUPREME ENGINEERING FEATS OF THE PLANET. IT STRETCHED AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD SEE FROM HEADLAND TO HEADLAND.
THREE DAYS AFTER THE SINKING OF THE 'DAVELI' – IT HAPPENED!
AAGH! THE BRIDGE IS COLLAPSING!
THE SECOND DISASTER!

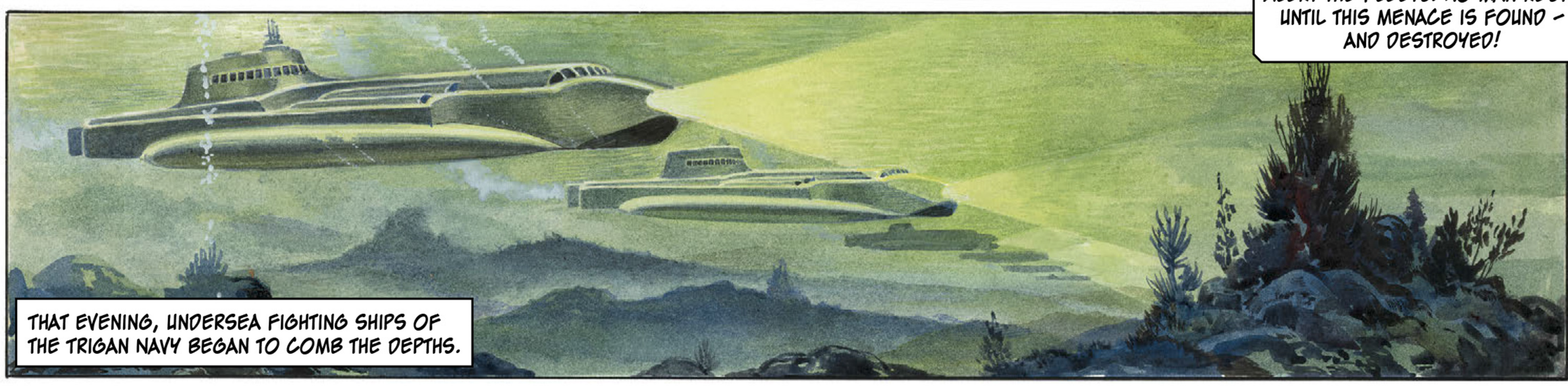

NEWS OF THE DISASTER WAS FLASHED ROUND THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. TRIGO AND HIS STAFF WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO INSPECT THE TANGLED WRECKAGE IN THE CENTRE OF THE GREAT BRIDGE.

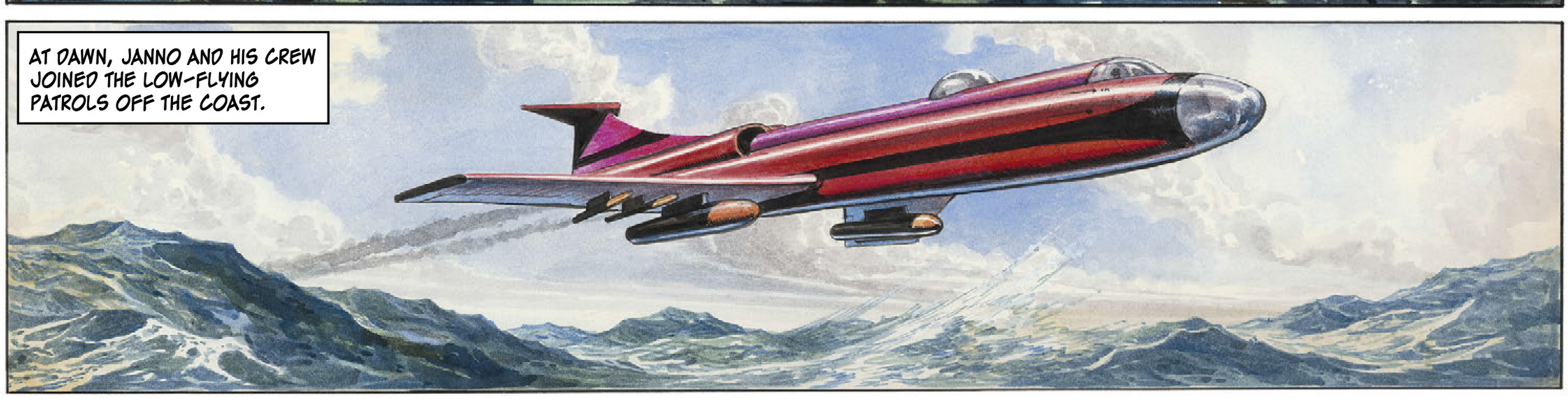

THE SCIENTIST PERIC COMMENTED GRIMLY...
SEE THAT MASSIVE PILLAR, IMPERIAL MAJESTY? IT IS SEVERED AS CLEANLY AS IF IT HAD BEEN SLICED BY A GIANT SWORD!

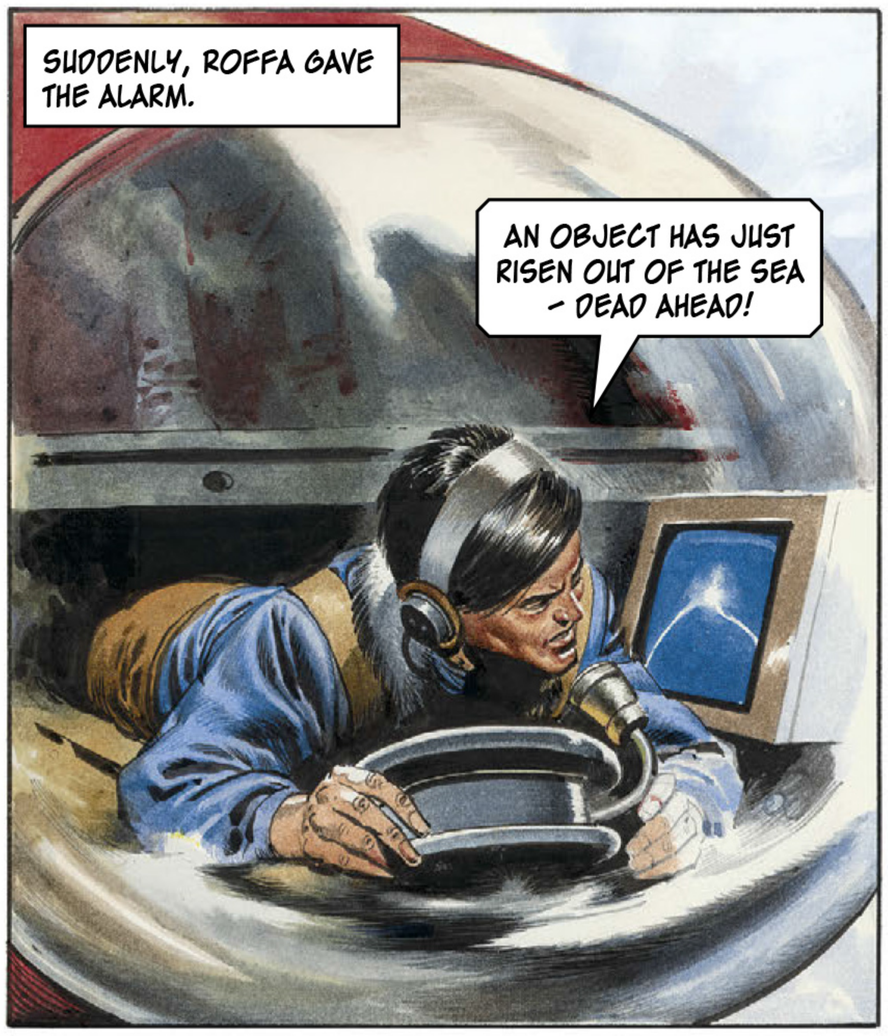
I THINK THAT THE SAME MALEVOLENT INTELLIGENCE THAT SANK THE 'DAVELI' WAS ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS!
YOU THINK?

I HAVE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE INSTRUMENT OF DESTRUCTION WAS SEA-BORNE – PROBABLY CARRIED IN SOME UNDERWATER CRAFT. FIND AN ALIEN UNDERWATER CRAFT ARMED WITH A WEAPON THAT CAN CUT METAL LIKE WAX AND YOU HAVE THE ANSWER.

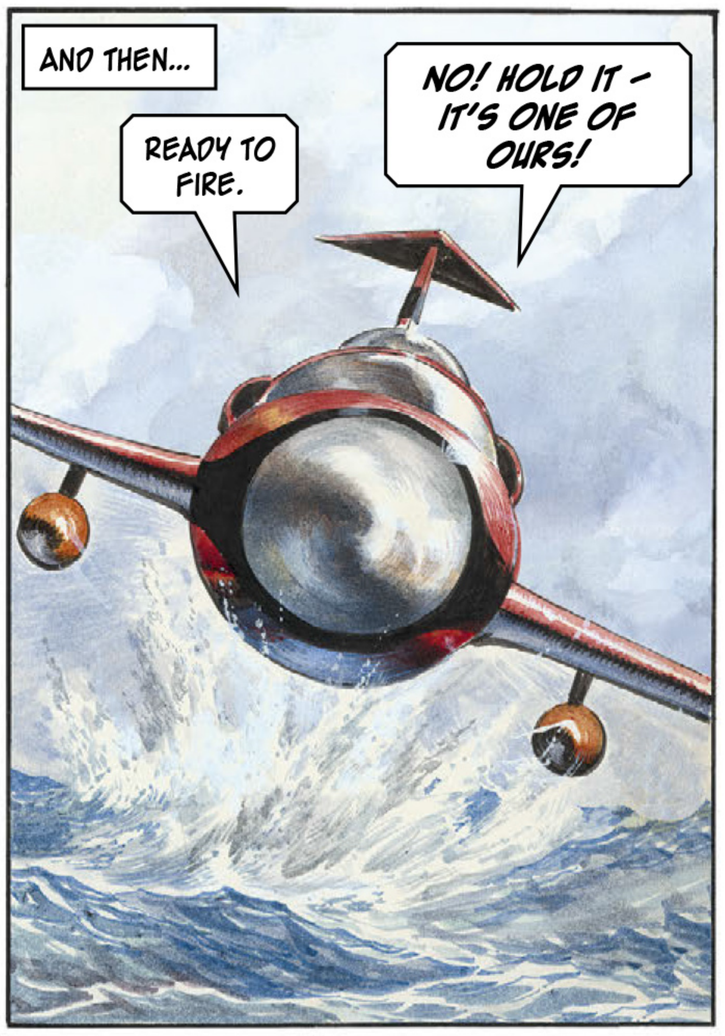

TRIGO ISSUED HIS ORDERS.
FROM NOW UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, CONSTANT AIR AND UNDERWATER PATROLS WILL BE CARRIED OUT AROUND THE TRIGAN COASTLINE. ALERT THE FLEETS. NO MAN RESTS UNTIL THIS MENACE IS FOUND – AND DESTROYED!

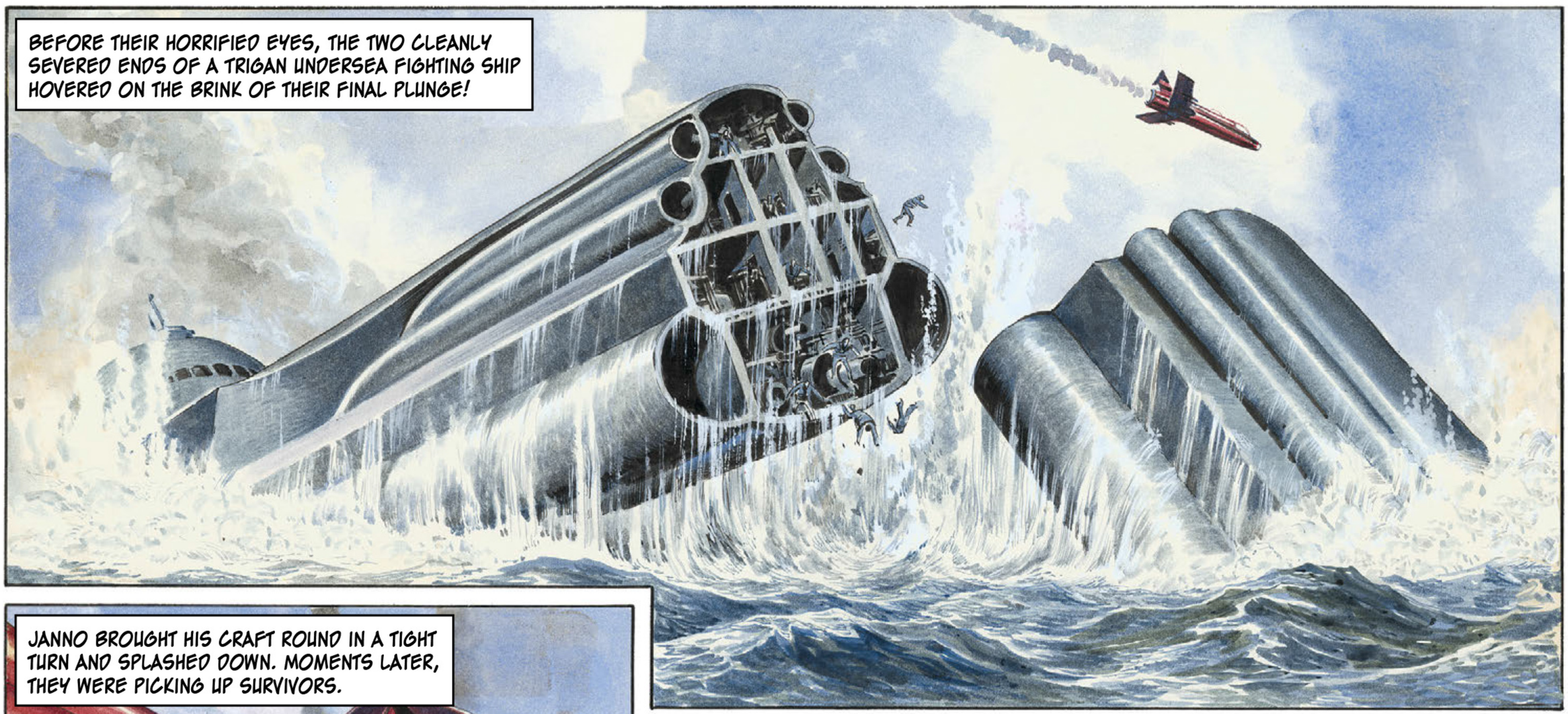

THAT EVENING, UNDERSEA FIGHTING SHIPS OF THE TRIGAN NAVY BEGAN TO COMB THE DEPTHS.

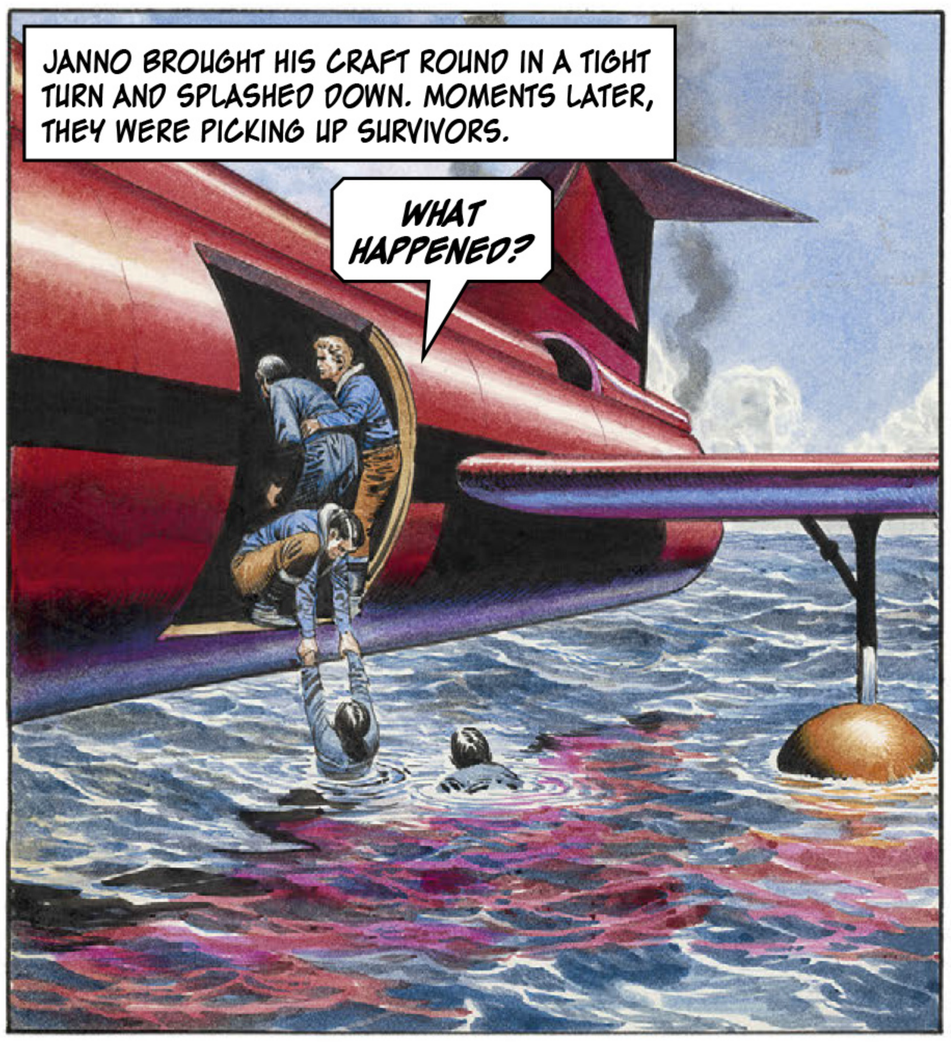

AT DAWN, JANNO AND HIS CREW JOINED THE LOW-FLYING PATROLS OFF THE COAST.


SUDDENLY, ROFFA GAVE THE ALARM.
AN OBJECT HAS JUST RISEN OUT OF THE SEA - DEAD AHEAD!

JANNO SIGHTED THE SHAPE IN THE WATER.
STAND BY TO FIRE PROJECTILES!

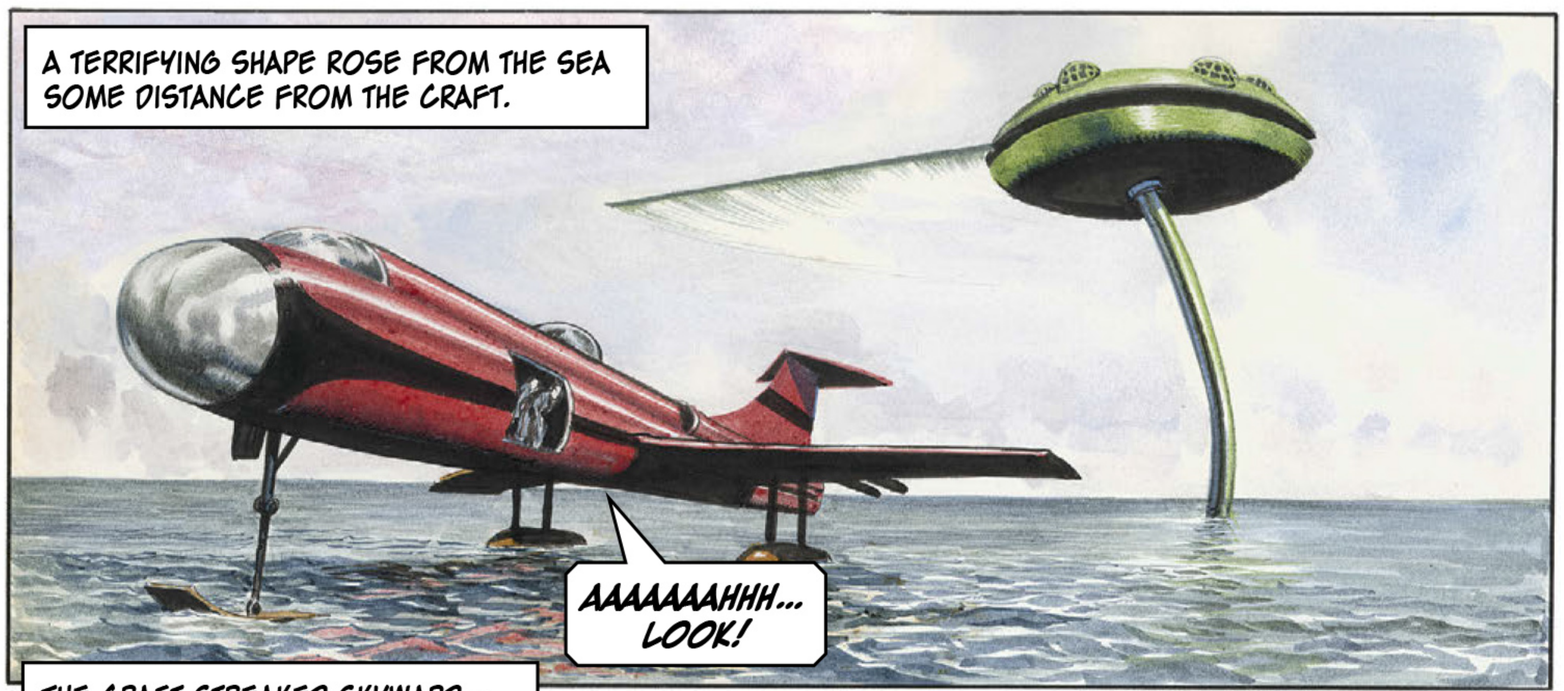

AND THEN...
READY TO FIRE.
NO! HOLD IT - IT'S ONE OF OURS!


BEFORE THEIR HORRIFIED EYES, THE TWO CLEANLY SEVERED ENDS OF A TRIGAN UNDERSEA FIGHTING SHIP HOVERED ON THE BRINK OF THEIR FINAL PLUNGE!

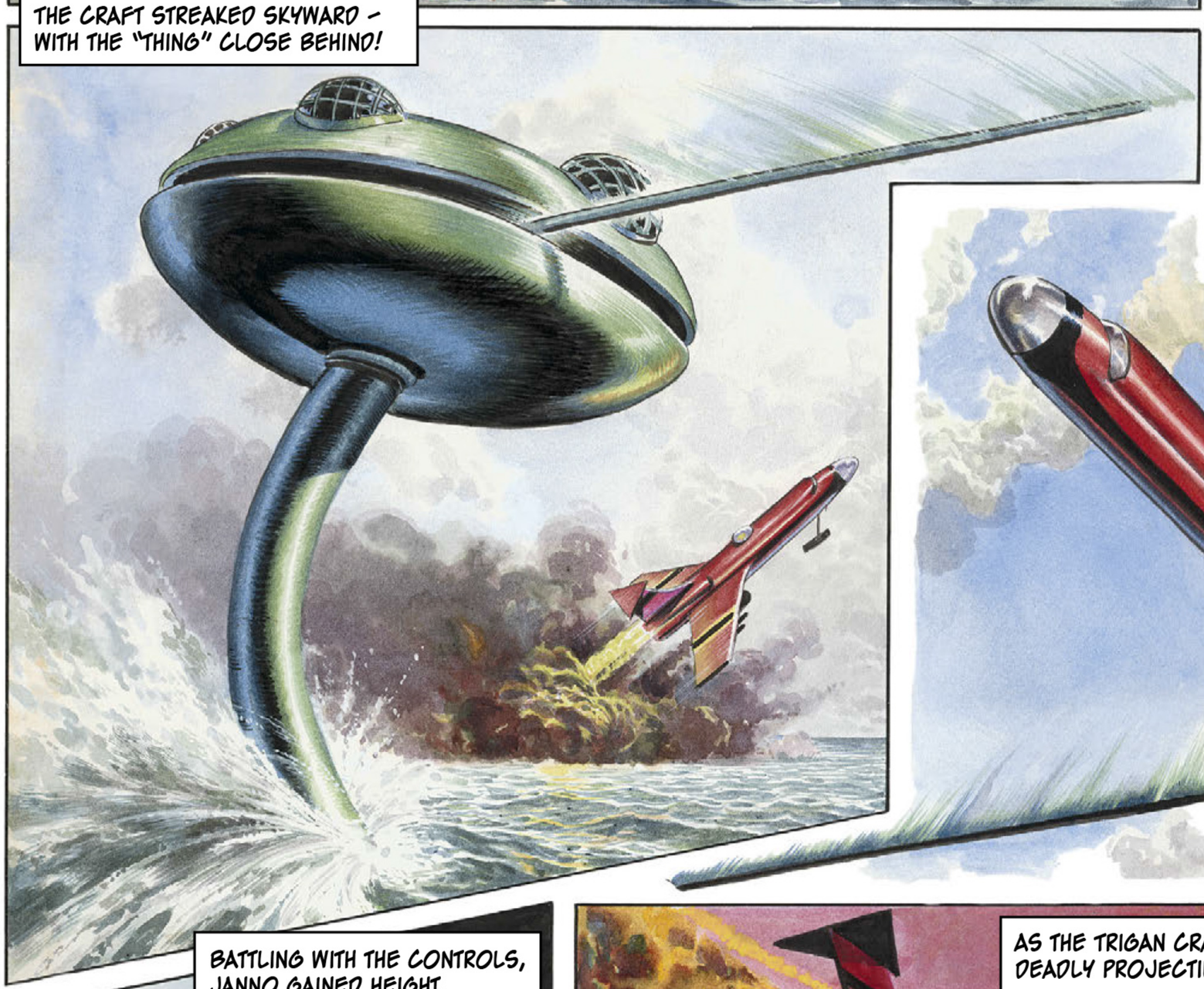

JANNO BROUGHT HIS CRAFT ROUND IN A TIGHT TURN AND SPLASHED DOWN. MOMENTS LATER, THEY WERE PICKING UP SURVIVORS.
WHAT HAPPENED?

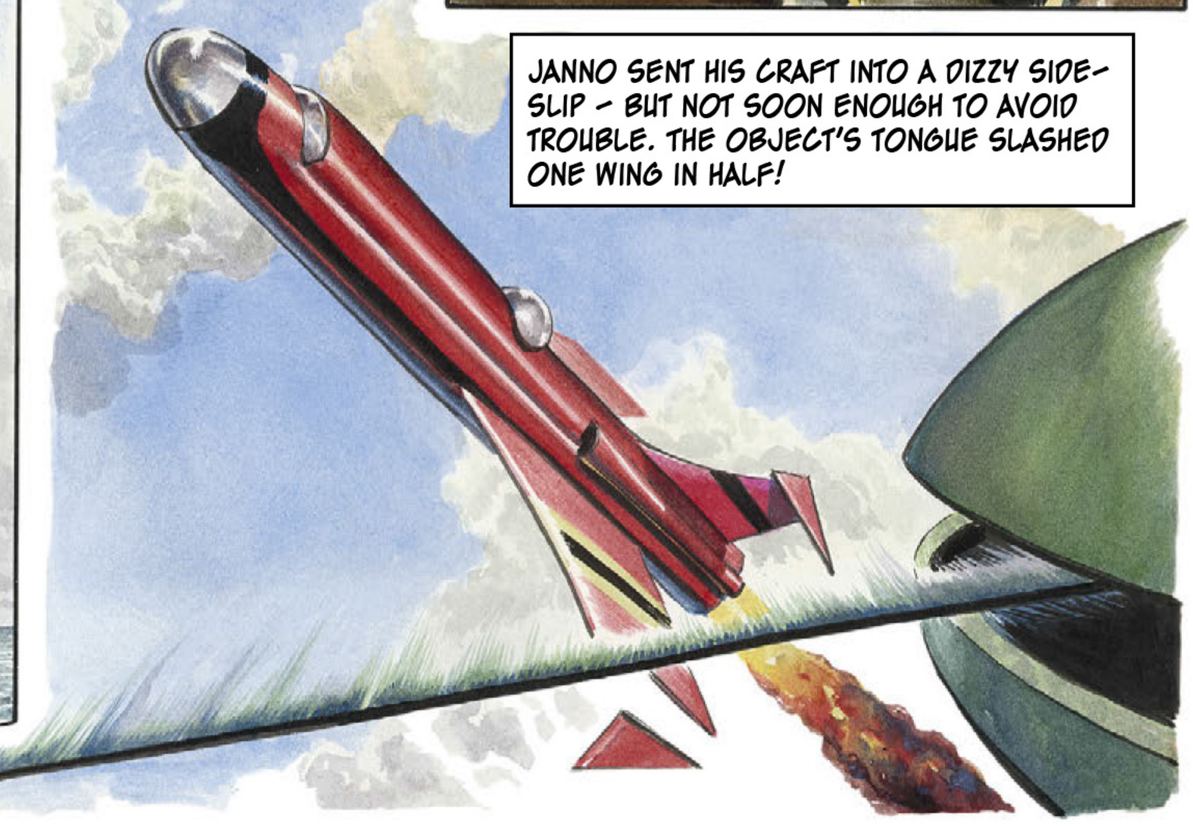
WE SAW IT COMING AT US... THERE WAS NO ESCAPE!

AND THEN...
BY ALL THE STARS!
AAAGH! THERE IT IS AGAIN!

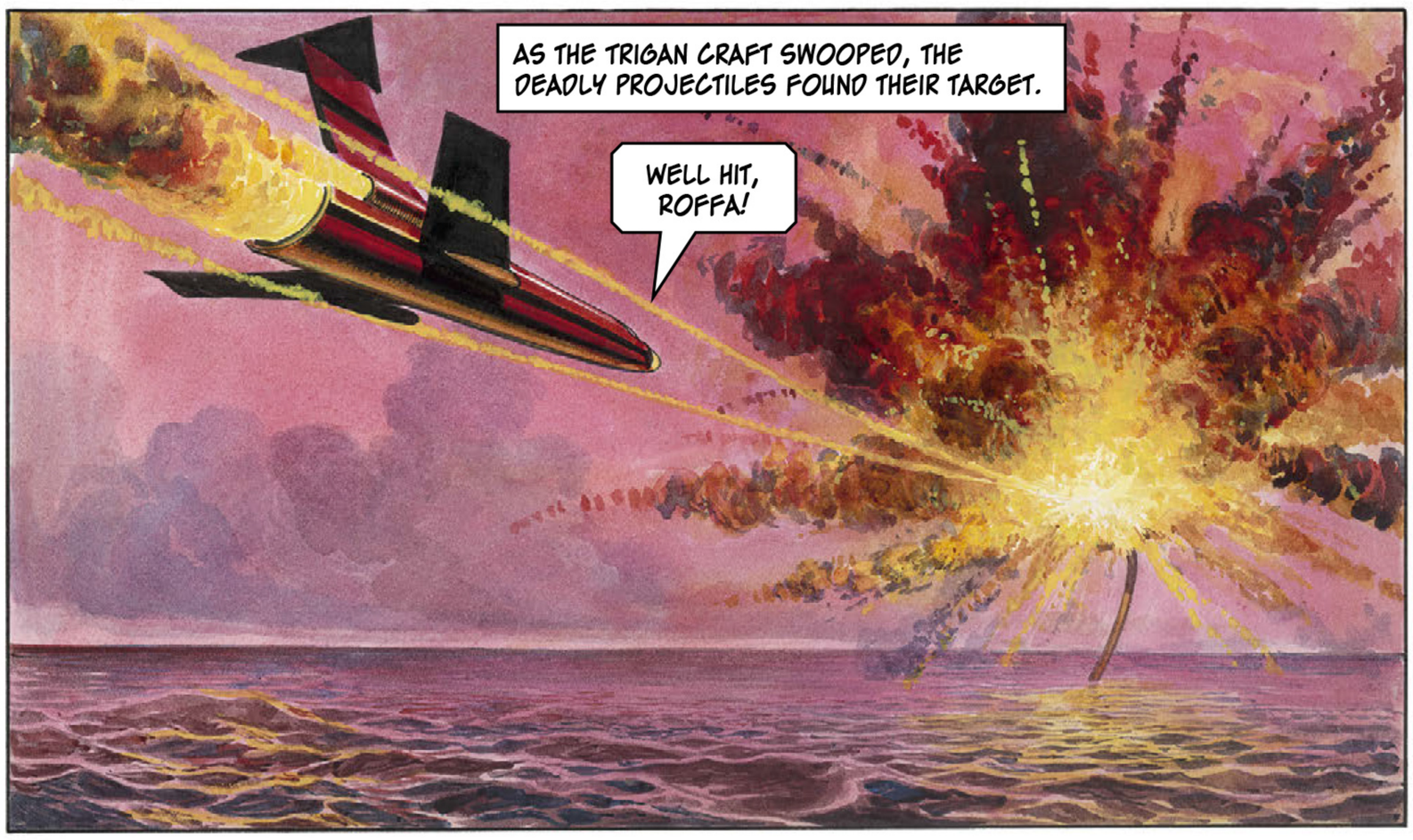

A TERRIFYING SHAPE ROSE FROM THE SEA SOME DISTANCE FROM THE CRAFT.
AAAAAAAHHH... LOOK!

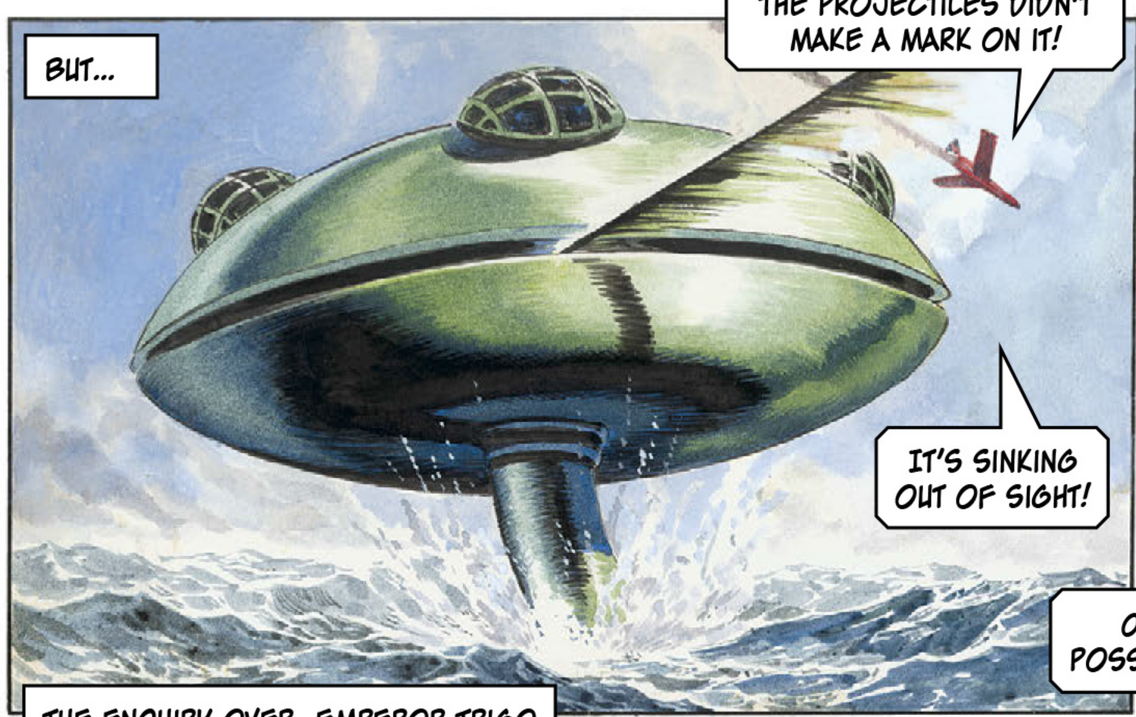
IT'S COMING AT US!
START THE ENGINES! PREPARE FOR EMERGENCY TAKE-OFF!


THE CRAFT STREAKED SKYWARD – WITH THE "THING" CLOSE BEHIND!

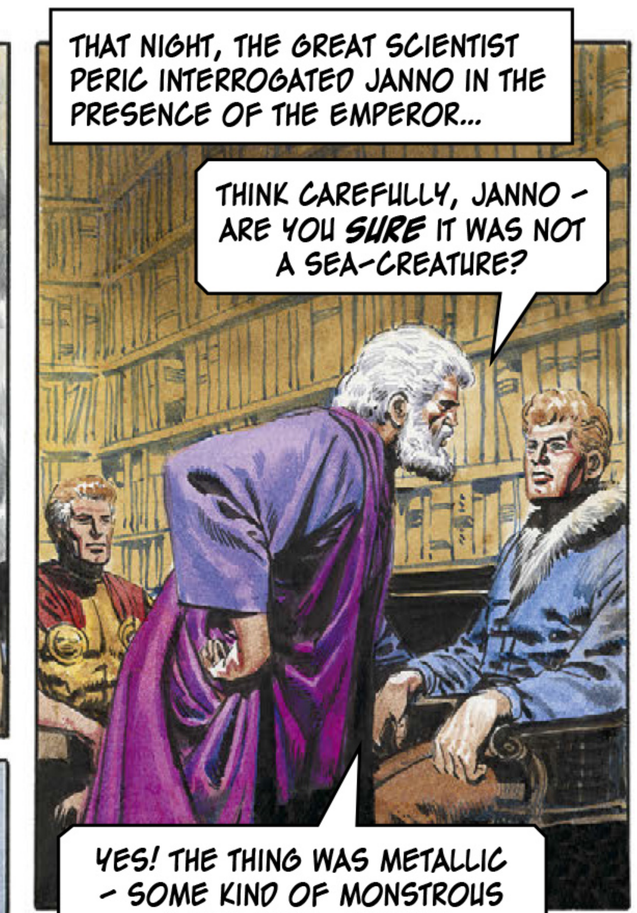

JANNO SENT HIS CRAFT INTO A DIZZY SIDE-SLIP – BUT NOT SOON ENOUGH TO AVOID TROUBLE. THE OBJECT'S TONGUE SLASHED ONE WING IN HALF!

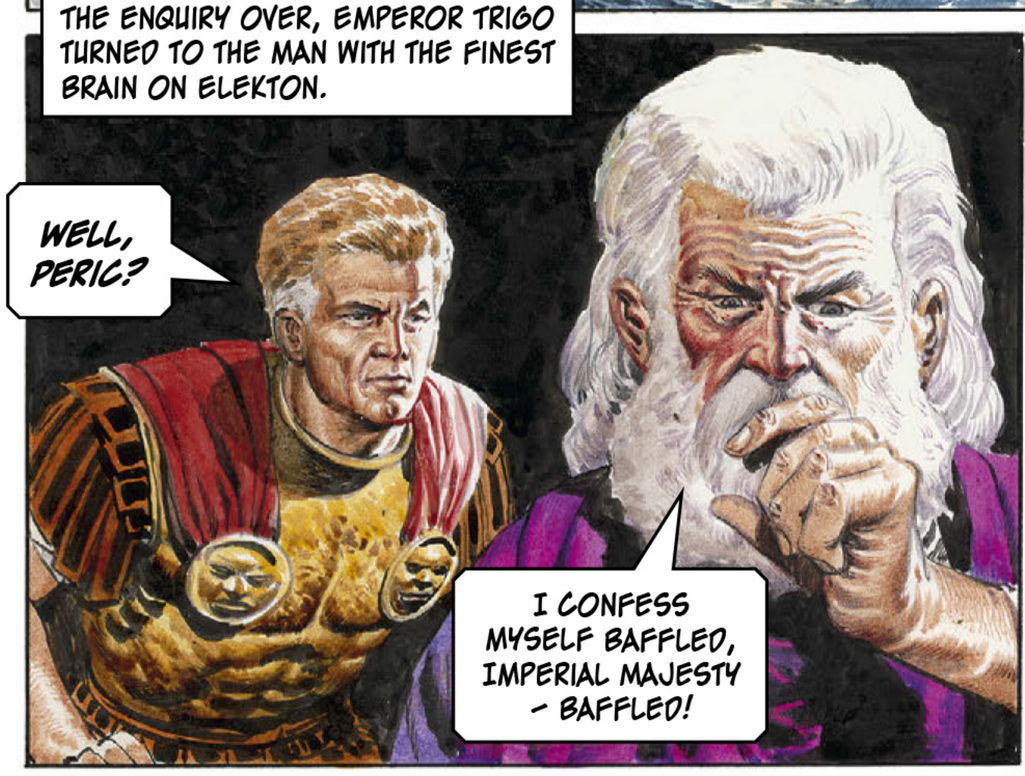
BATTLING WITH THE CONTROLS, JANNO GAINED HEIGHT.
I'M GOING TO MAKE A COUNTER ATTACK! STAND BY TO FIRE THE PROJECTILES, ROFFA!
RIGHT!

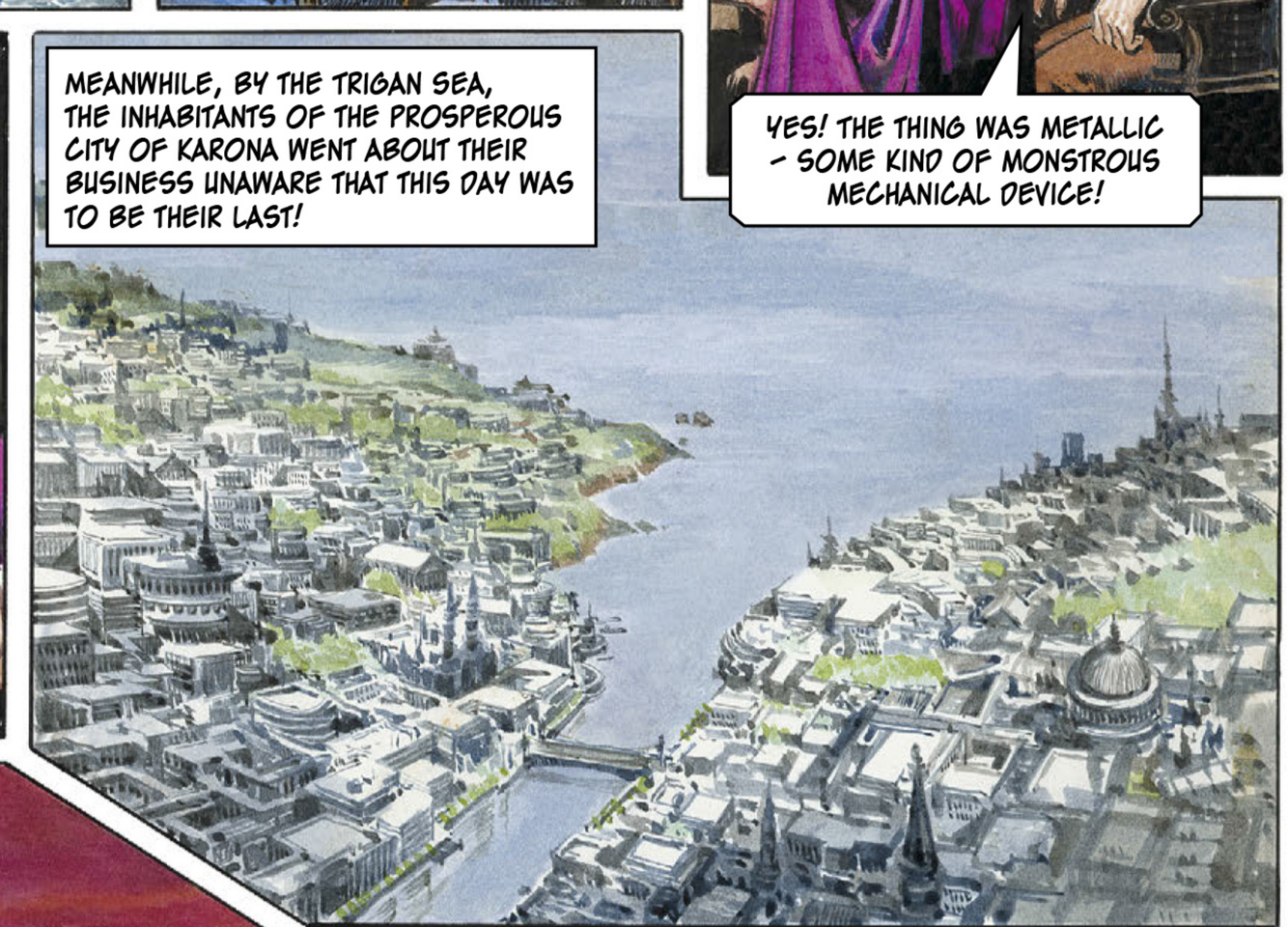

AS THE TRIGAN CRAFT SWOOPED, THE DEADLY PROJECTILES FOUND THEIR TARGET.
WELL HIT, ROFFA!

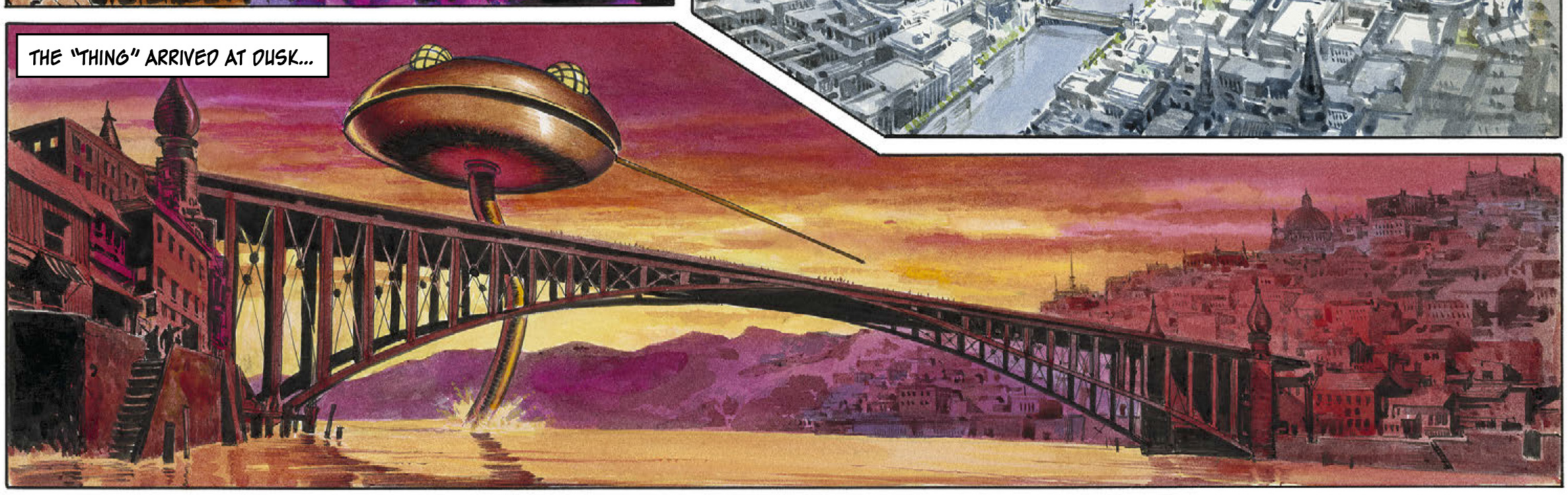

BUT...
THE PROJECTILES DIDN'T MAKE A MARK ON IT!
IT'S SINKING OUT OF SIGHT!

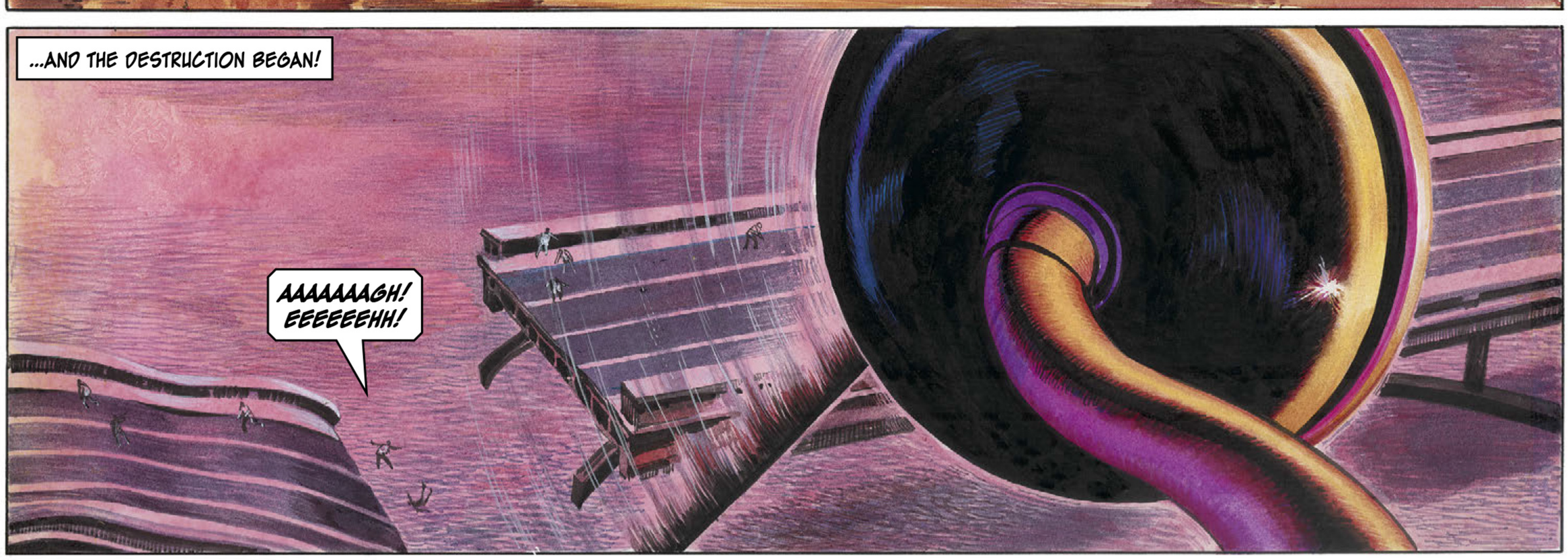
WHEN IT VANISHED, JANNO AND HIS COMRADE EXCHANGED GRIM GLANCES.
WHAT- WHAT IS THAT THING?
ONLY ONE MAN ON ELEKTON COULD POSSIBLY ANSWER THAT QUESTION - PERIC!

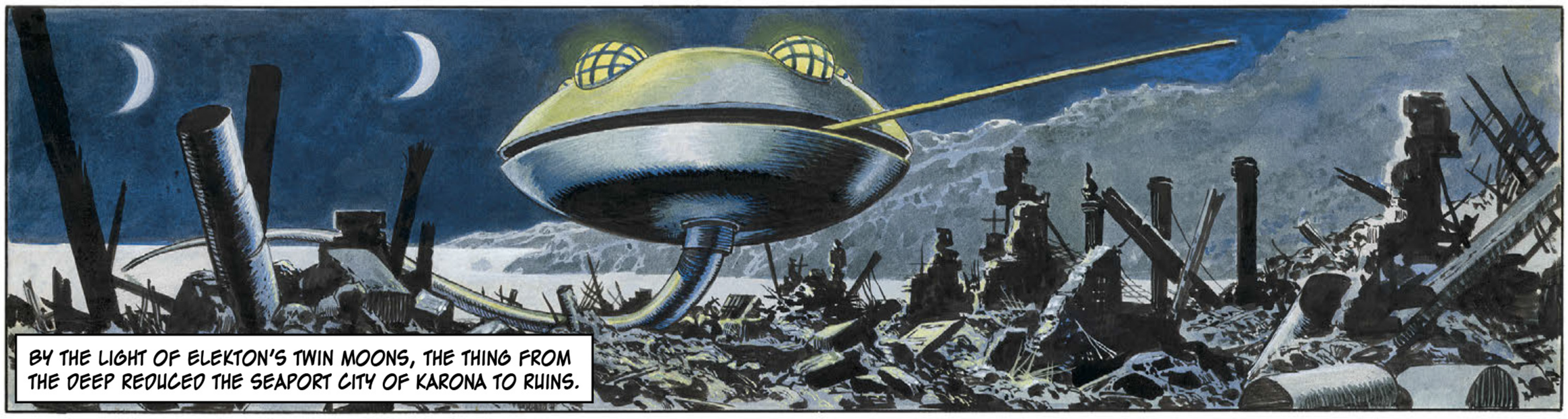

THAT NIGHT, THE GREAT SCIENTIST PERIC INTERROGATED JANNO IN THE PRESENCE OF THE EMPEROR...
THINK CAREFULLY, JANNO - ARE YOU SURE IT WAS NOT A SEA-CREATURE?
YES! THE THING WAS METALLIC - SOME KIND OF MONSTROUS MECHANICAL DEVICE!

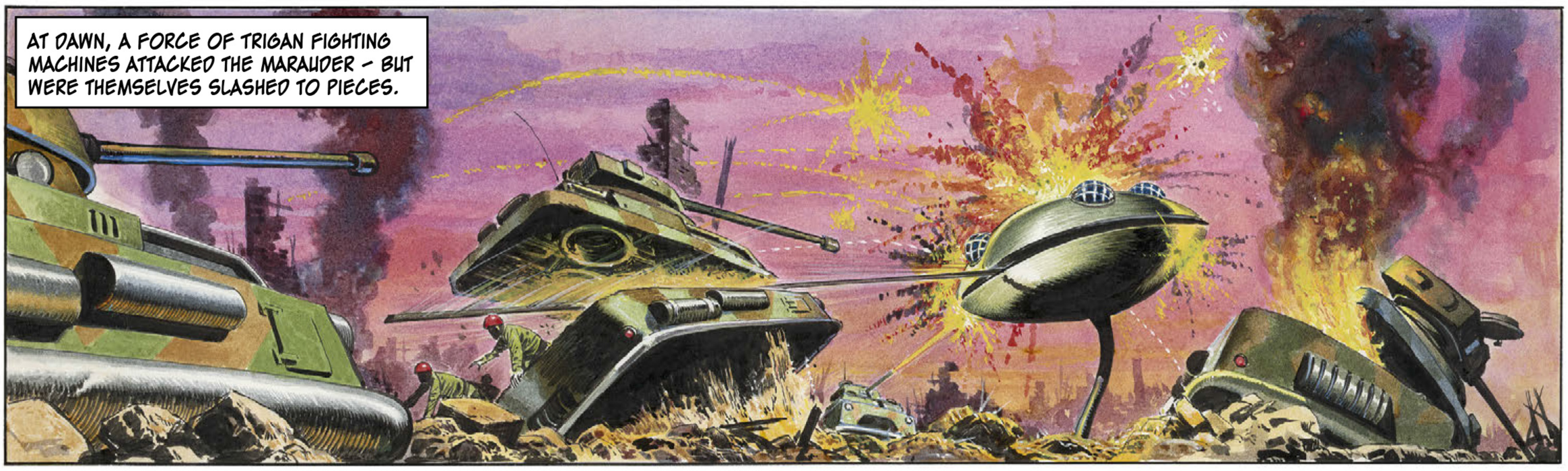

THE ENQUIRY OVER, EMPEROR TRIGO TURNED TO THE MAN WITH THE FINEST BRAIN ON ELEKTON.
WELL, PERIC?
I CONFESS MYSELF BAFFLED, IMPERIAL MAJESTY - BAFFLED!

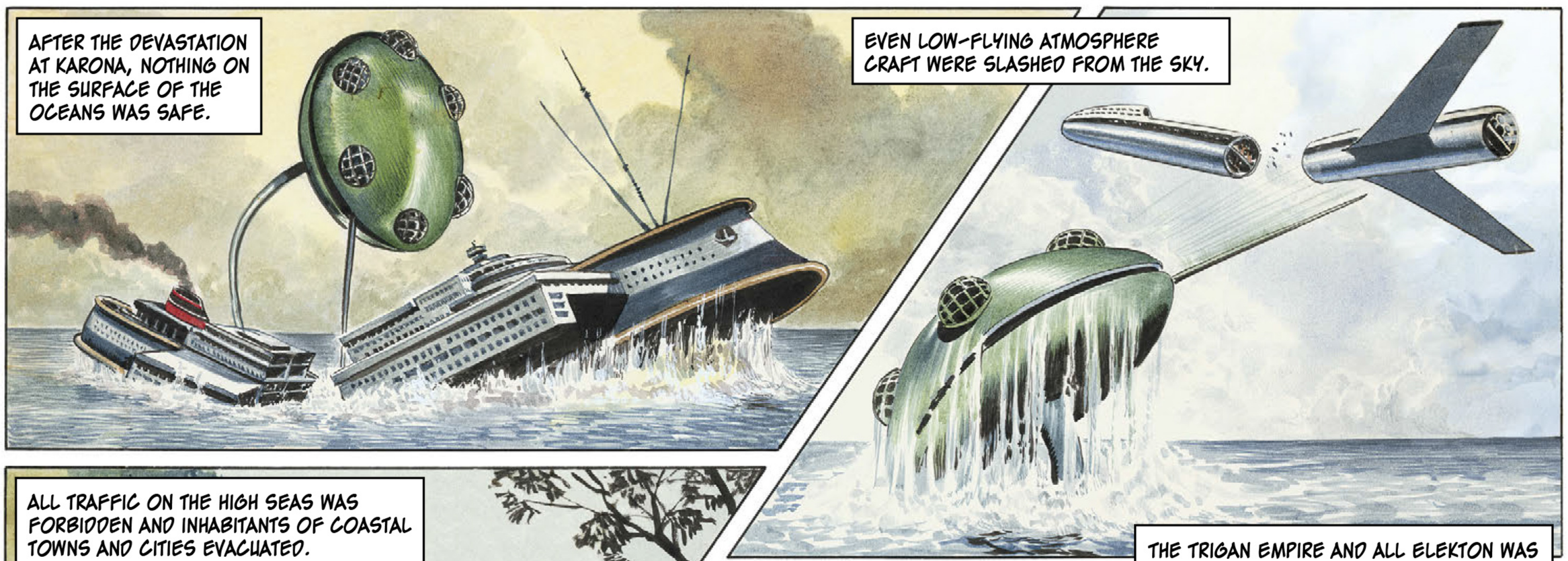

MEANWHILE, BY THE TRIGAN SEA, THE INHABITANTS OF THE PROSPEROUS CITY OF KARONA WENT ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS UNAWARE THAT THIS DAY WAS TO BE THEIR LAST!

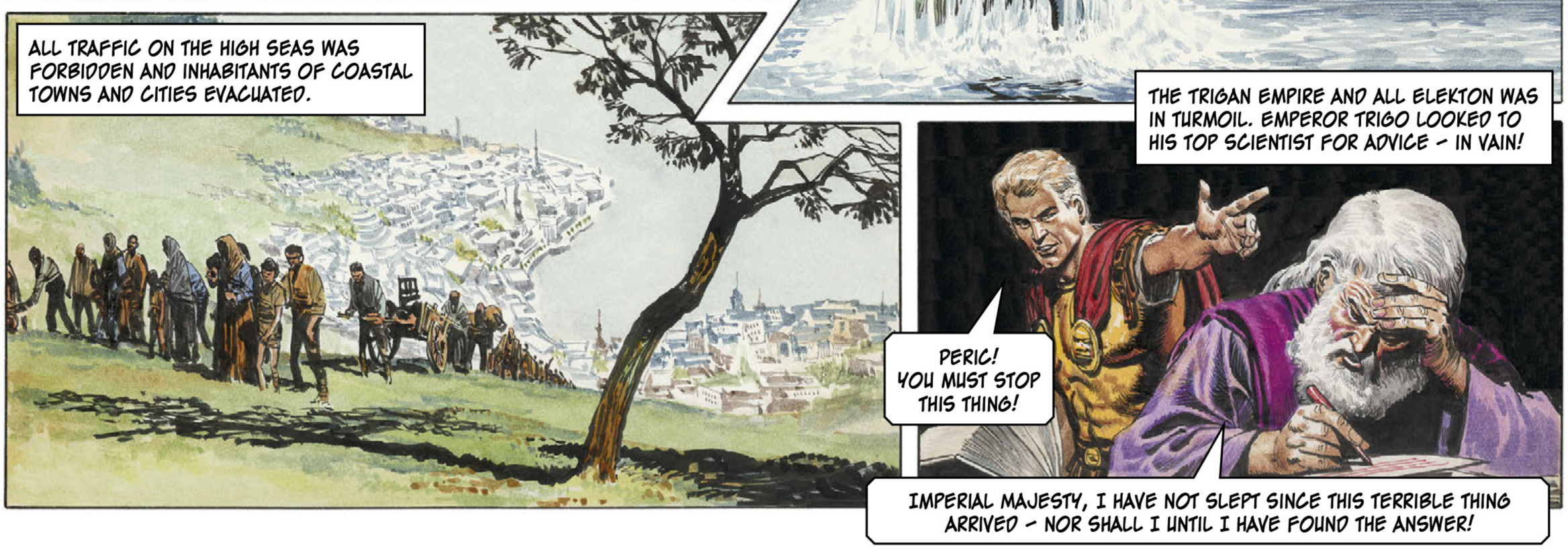

THE "THING" ARRIVED AT DUSK...


...AND THE DESTRUCTION BEGAN!
AAAAAAAGH! EEEEEEHH!

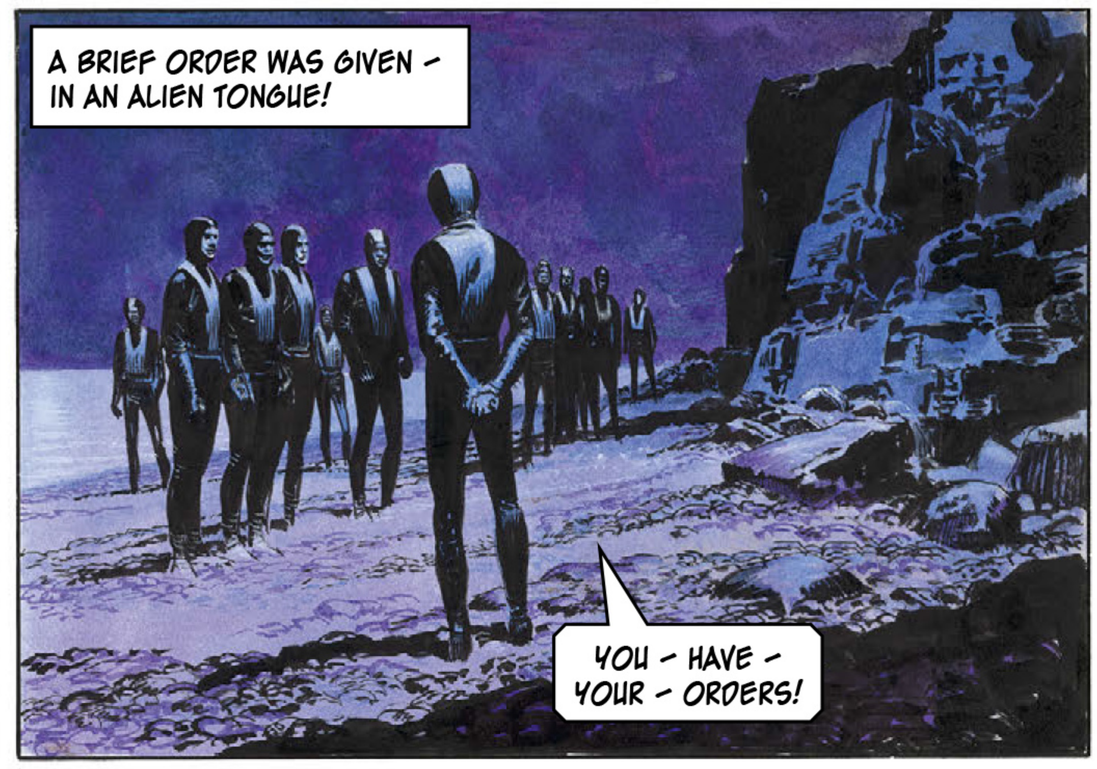

BY THE LIGHT OF ELEKTON'S TWIN MOONS, THE THING FROM THE DEEP REDUCED THE SEAPORT CITY OF KARONA TO RUINS.


AT DAWN, A FORCE OF TRIGAN FIGHTING MACHINES ATTACKED THE MARAUDER – BUT WERE THEMSELVES SLASHED TO PIECES.


AFTER THE DEVASTATION AT KARONA, NOTHING ON THE SURFACE OF THE OCEANS WAS SAFE.
EVEN LOW-FLYING ATMOSPHERE CRAFT WERE SLASHED FROM THE SKY.


ALL TRAFFIC ON THE HIGH SEAS WAS FORBIDDEN AND INHABITANTS OF COASTAL TOWNS AND CITIES EVACUATED.
THE TRIGAN EMPIRE AND ALL ELEKTON WAS IN TURMOIL. EMPEROR TRIGO LOOKED TO HIS TOP SCIENTIST FOR ADVICE – IN VAIN!
PERIC! YOU MUST STOP THIS THING!
IMPERIAL MAJESTY, I HAVE NOT SLEPT SINCE THIS TERRIBLE THING ARRIVED – NOR SHALL I UNTIL I HAVE FOUND THE ANSWER!

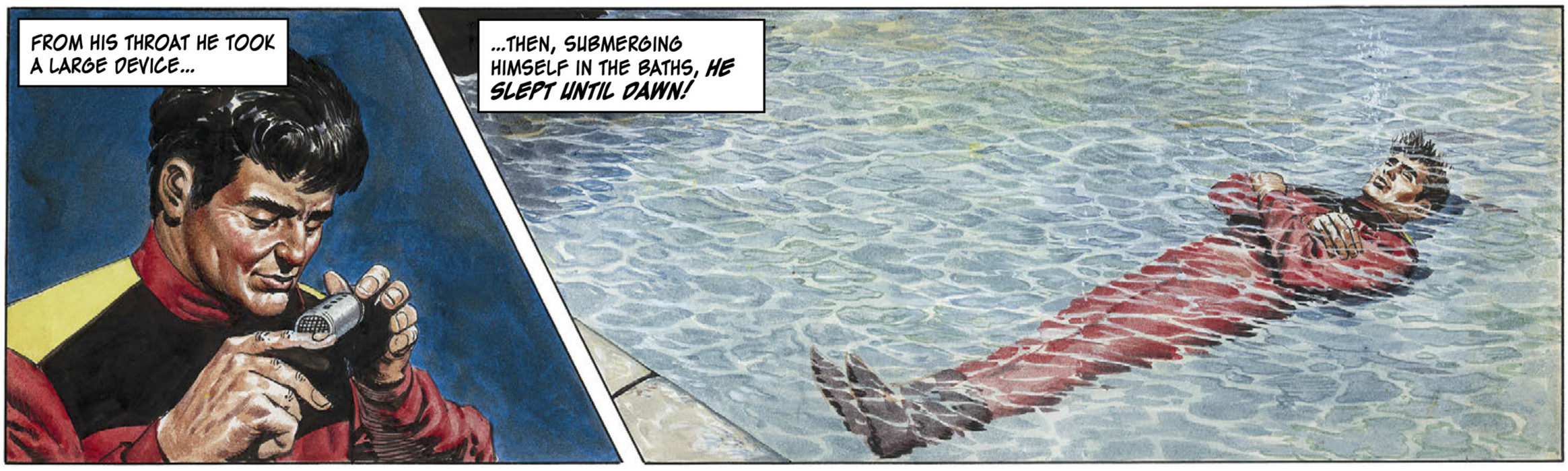
ONE NIGHT, A GROUP OF DIVERS WADED ASHORE ON A DESERTED STRETCH OF THE TRIGAN COAST.

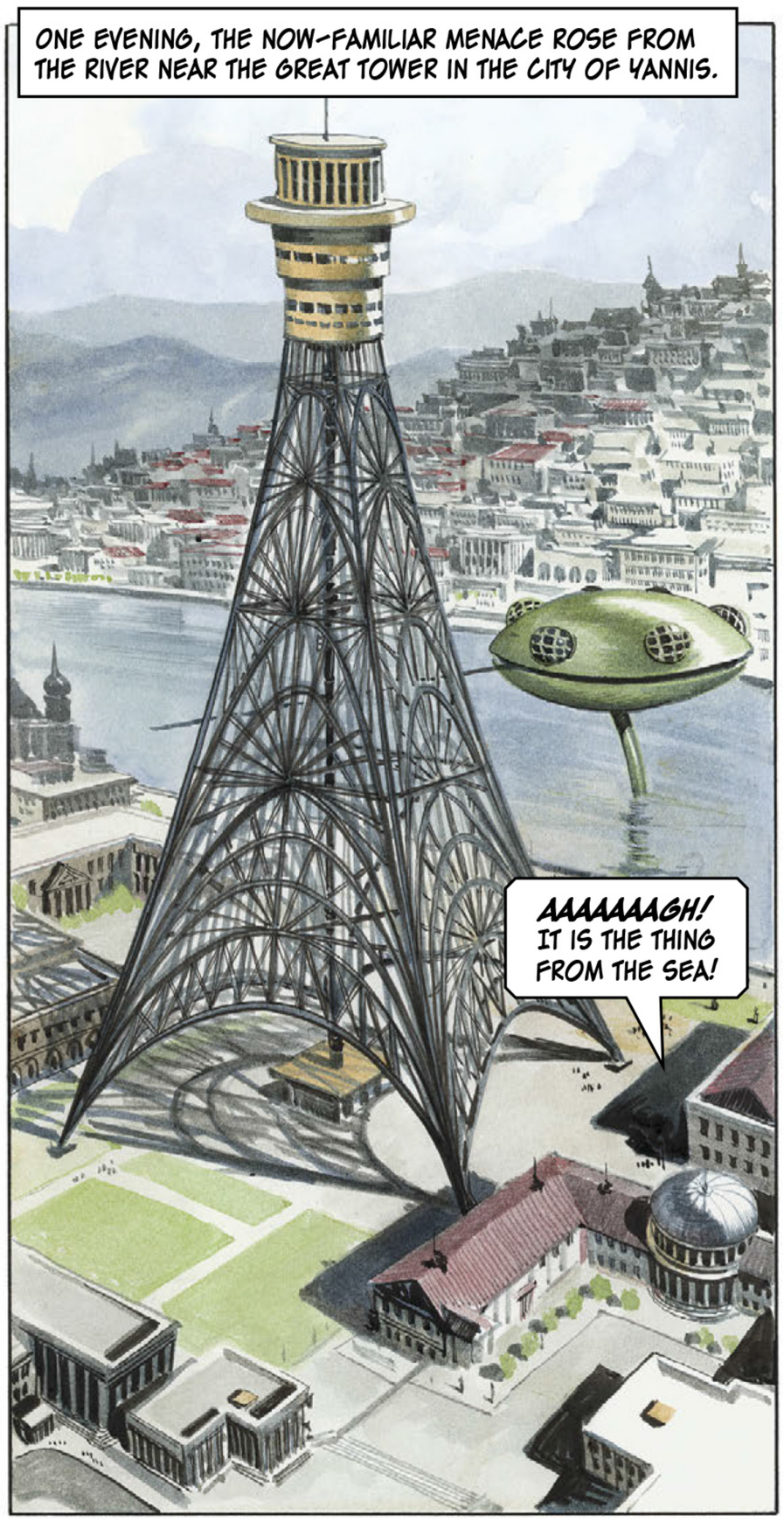

A BRIEF ORDER WAS GIVEN – IN AN ALIEN TONGUE!
YOU – HAVE – YOUR – ORDERS!

NEXT DAY, ONE OF THESE STRANGERS JOINED THE ARMY.
WANT TO JOIN THE IMPERIAL GUARDS, EH? NAME AND BIRTHPLACE, PLEASE.
ZATTI IS MY NAME, SIR – AND I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THARV.

ZATTI DID WELL IN THE ELITE GUARDS REGIMENT.

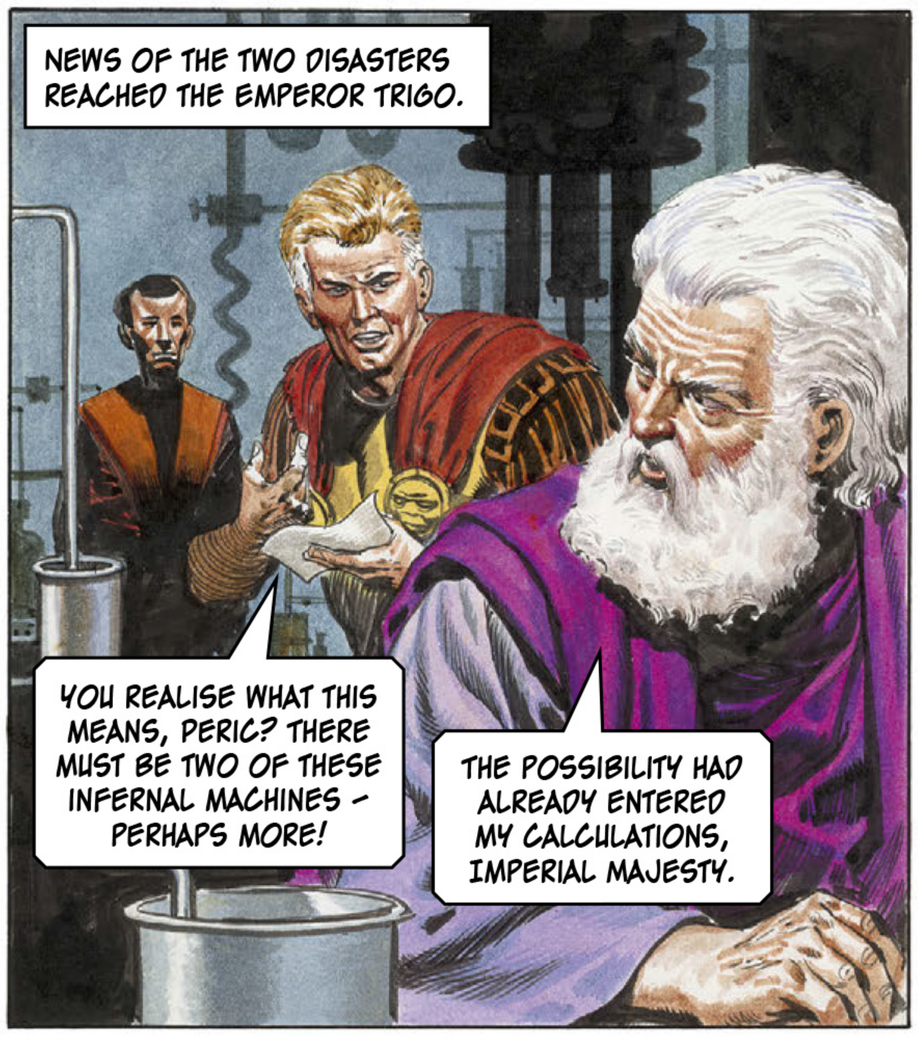
TO ALL APPEARANCES A NORMAL INDIVIDUAL, ZATTI HAD A STRANGE HABIT. AT NIGHT, HE CREPT INTO THE DESERTED REGIMENTAL BATHS...


FROM HIS THROAT HE TOOK A LARGE DEVICE...
...THEN, SUBMERGING HIMSELF IN THE BATHS, HE SLEPT UNTIL DAWN!

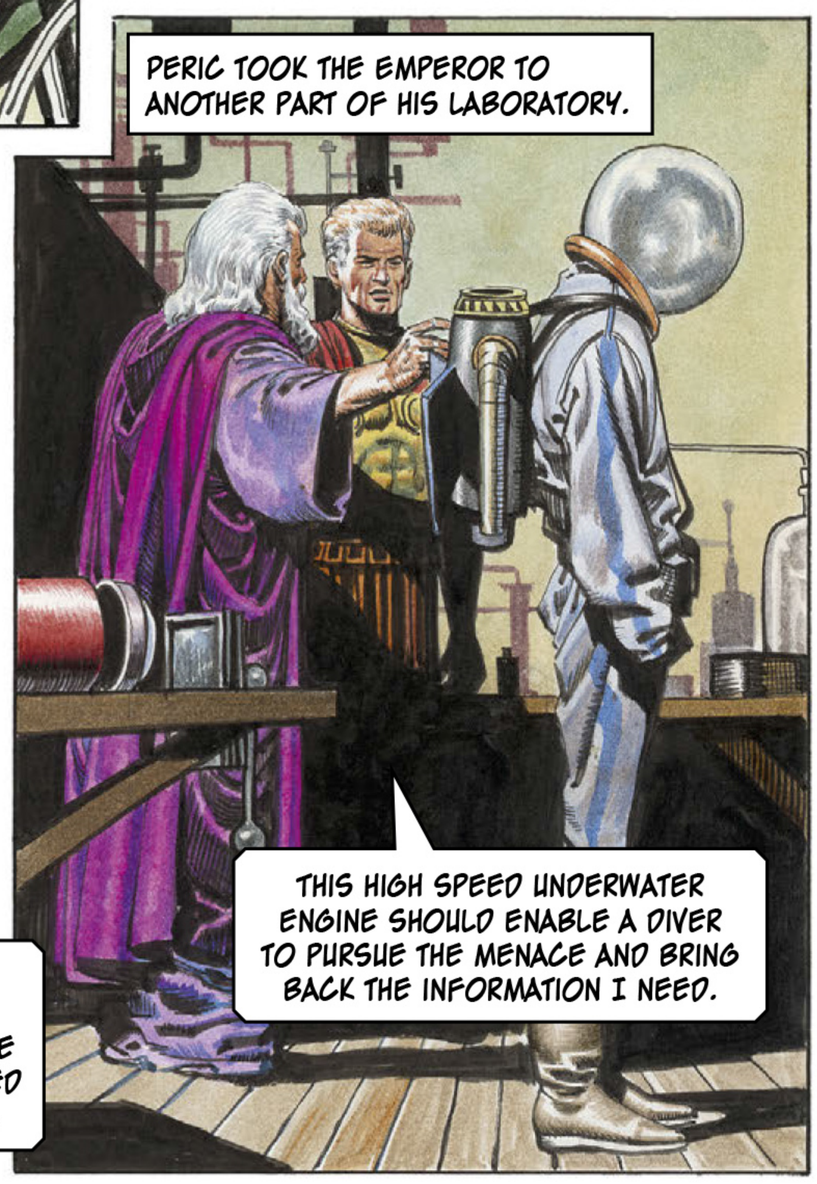

ONE EVENING, THE NOW-FAMILIAR MENACE ROSE FROM THE RIVER NEAR THE GREAT TOWER IN THE CITY OF YANNIS.
AAAAAAAGH! IT IS THE THING FROM THE SEA!

ONE SLASH OF THE STRANGE ANTENNA – AND THE TOWER WAS RIVEN!

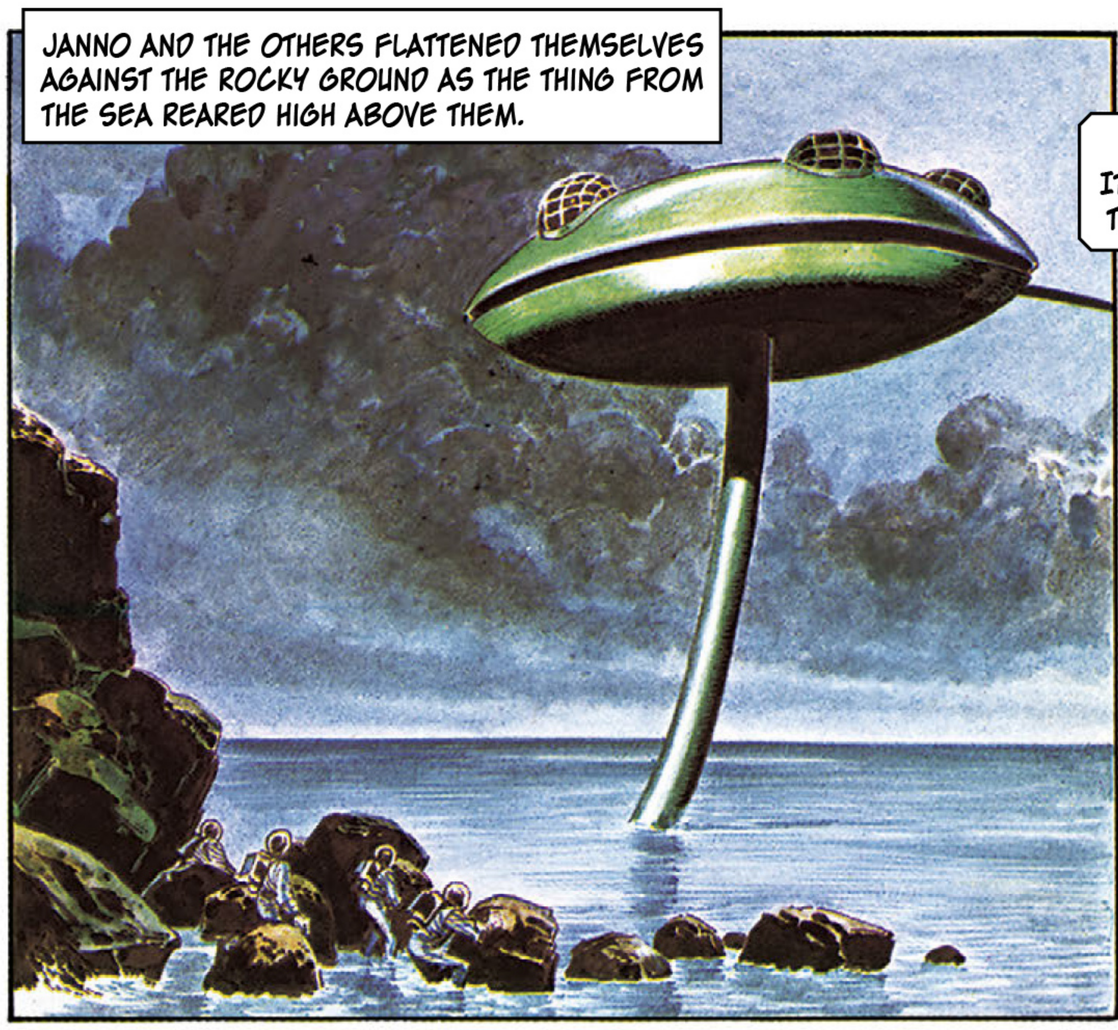
AT ALMOST THE SAME MOMENT, ON THE DISTANT ISLE OF ZOOTH, THE LIGHTHOUSE MET THE SAME FATE!


NEWS OF THE TWO DISASTERS REACHED THE EMPEROR TRIGO.
YOU REALISE WHAT THIS MEANS, PERIC? THERE MUST BE TWO OF THESE INFERNAL MACHINES – PERHAPS MORE!
THE POSSIBILITY HAD ALREADY ENTERED MY CALCULATIONS, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

THEN WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT IT?
BEFORE I CAN DEVISE A MEANS OF COMBATING THE MENACE, I NEED TO KNOW THE LENGTH OF THE TRUNK ATTACHED TO THE HEAD OF THE DEVICE.

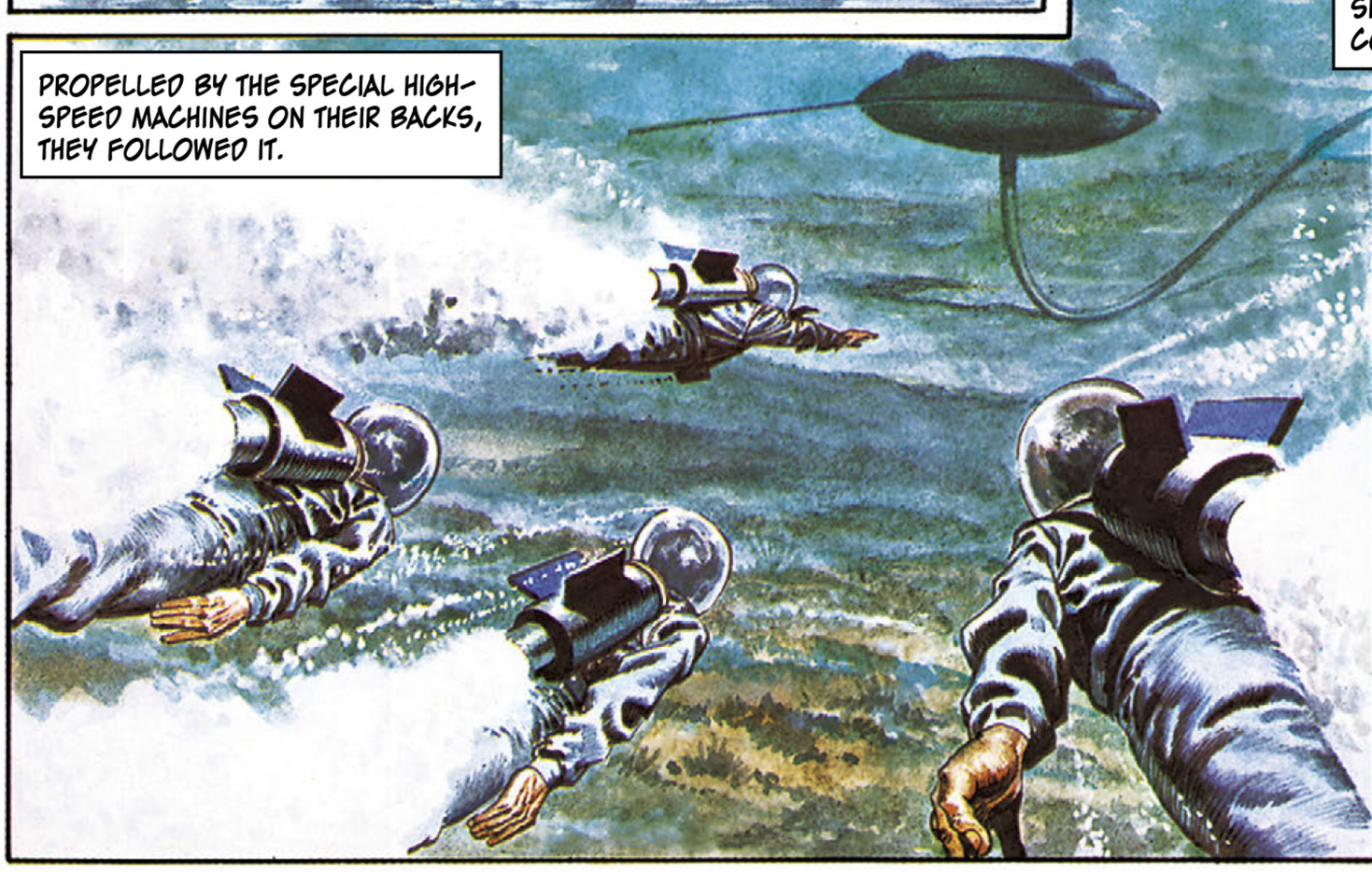

PERIC TOOK THE EMPEROR TO ANOTHER PART OF HIS LABORATORY.
THIS HIGH SPEED UNDERWATER ENGINE SHOULD ENABLE A DIVER TO PURSUE THE MENACE AND BRING BACK THE INFORMATION I NEED.

I WILL NEED A TEAM OF BRAVE VOLUNTEERS.
THERE WILL BE NO SHORTAGE OF THEM, PERIC. MAKE AS MANY OF YOUR ENGINES AS YOU CAN!
IT WORKS, PERIC!
YES – AND HE IS ONLY TRAVELLING AT HALF SPEED!
JANNO AND HIS COMRADES KEREN AND ROFFA WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO VOLUNTEER. JANNO TESTED THE ENGINE.
NOT EVERYONE WAS AS KEEN TO MEET THE MONSTER. IN THE BARRACKS OF THE IMPERIAL GUARDS...
"SPECIAL HAZARDOUS DUTY CONNECTED WITH THE UNDERSEA MENACE." WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THAT?
NOT FOR ME!
NOR ME!
BUT...
YOU, ZATTI?
I THINK I SHALL SURVIVE!
TIRED OF LIVING, ZATTI?
WITHIN A FEW DAYS, TEAMS OF FOUR VOLUNTEERS WERE READY TO LEAVE FOR SELECTED PARTS OF THE COAST. AND IN JANNO'S PARTY...
ZATTI OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD, SIR!
GLAD TO HAVE YOU WITH US, ZATTI.
THE FOLLOWING DAWN, THE FOUR WERE AT THEIR APPOINTED HIDING PLACE.
SEE ANYTHING, JANNO?
YES! ONE OF THE THINGS IS COMING STRAIGHT AT US!
DON LAWRENCE

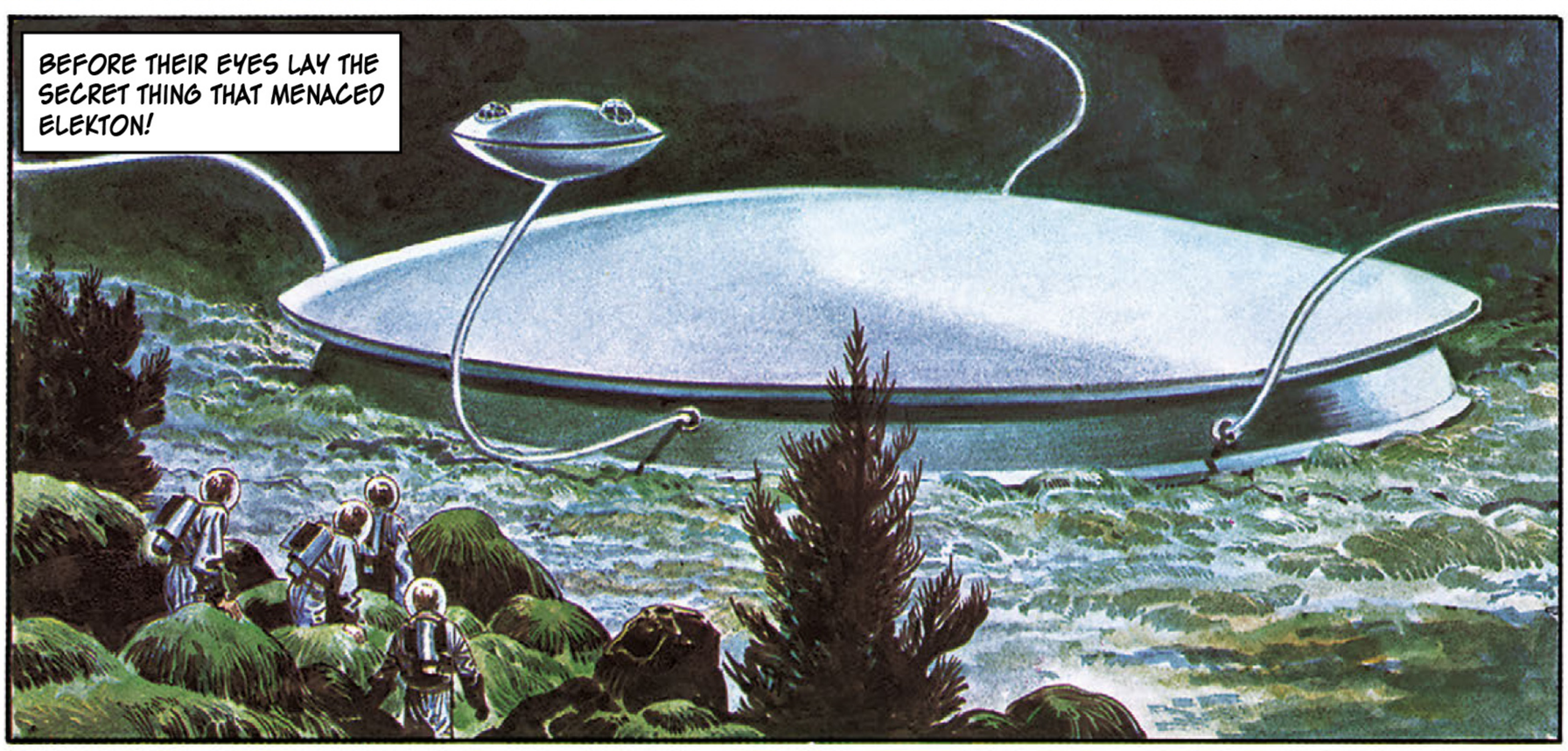

JANNO AND THE OTHERS FLATTENED THEMSELVES AGAINST THE ROCKY GROUND AS THE THING FROM THE SEA REARED HIGH ABOVE THEM.

AND THEN...
JANNO! IT'S GOING OUT TO SEA AGAIN!
RIGHT – WE'RE GOING AFTER IT!

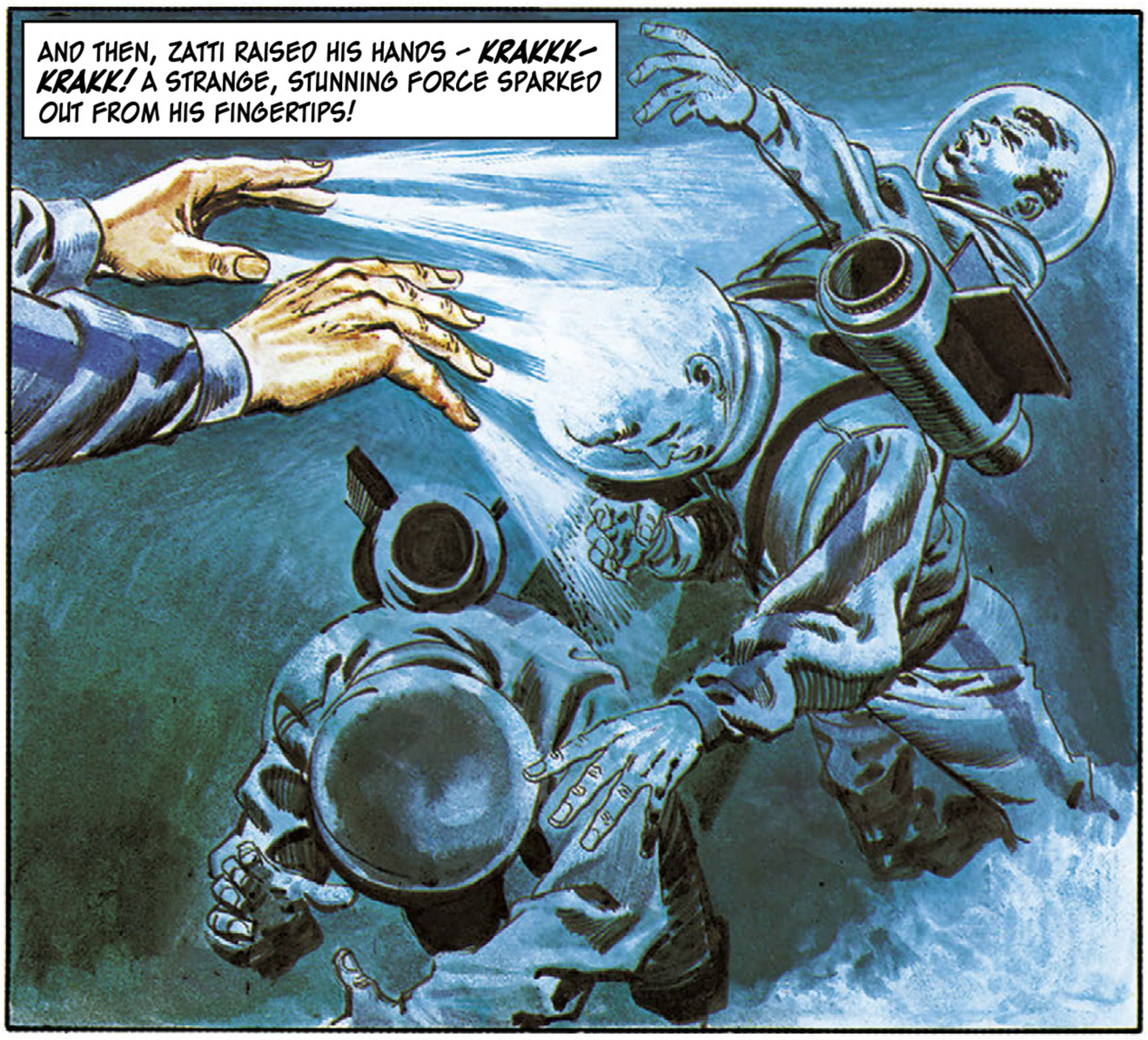
QUICKLY!

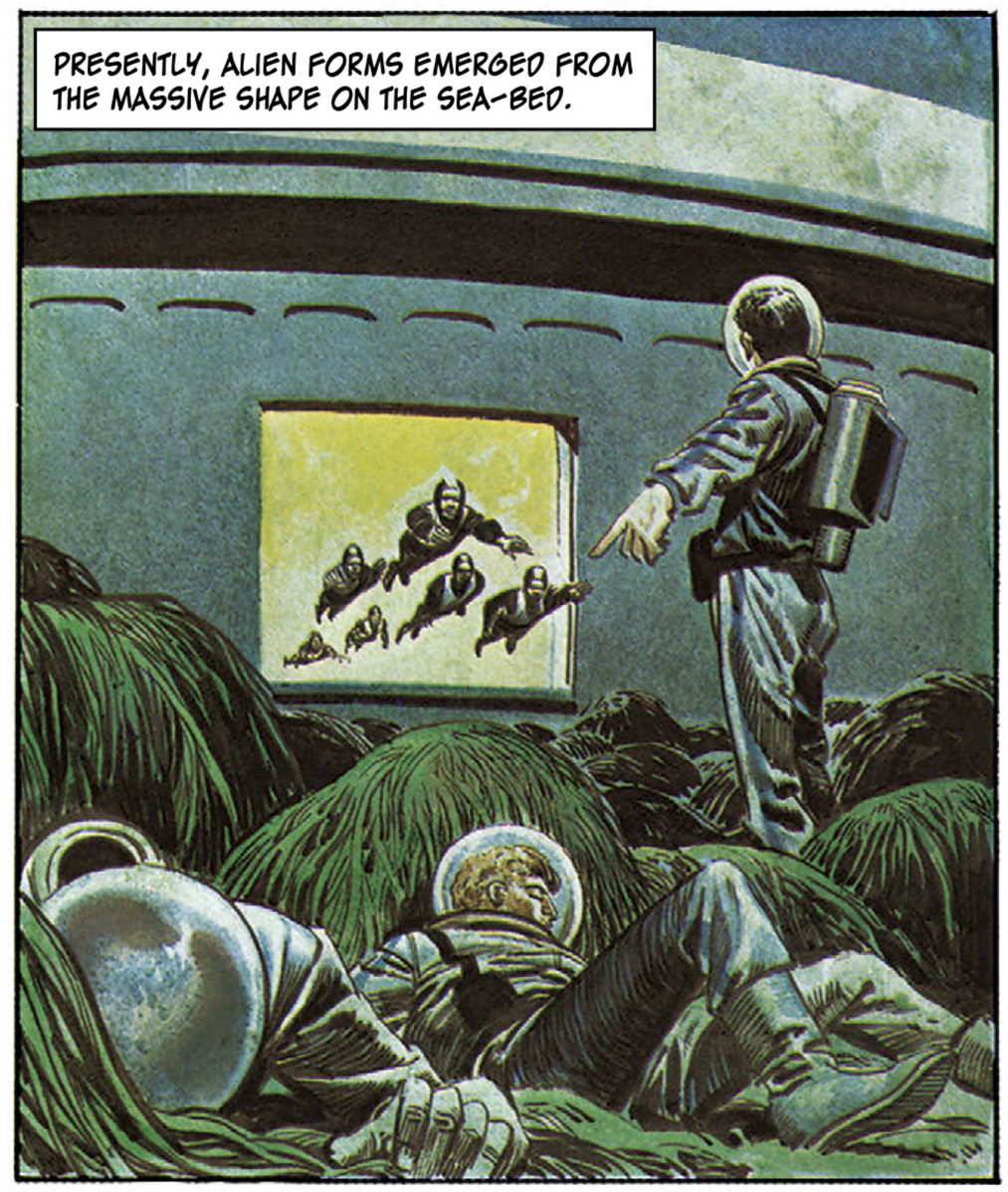

PROPELLED BY THE SPECIAL HIGH-SPEED MACHINES ON THEIR BACKS, THEY FOLLOWED IT.

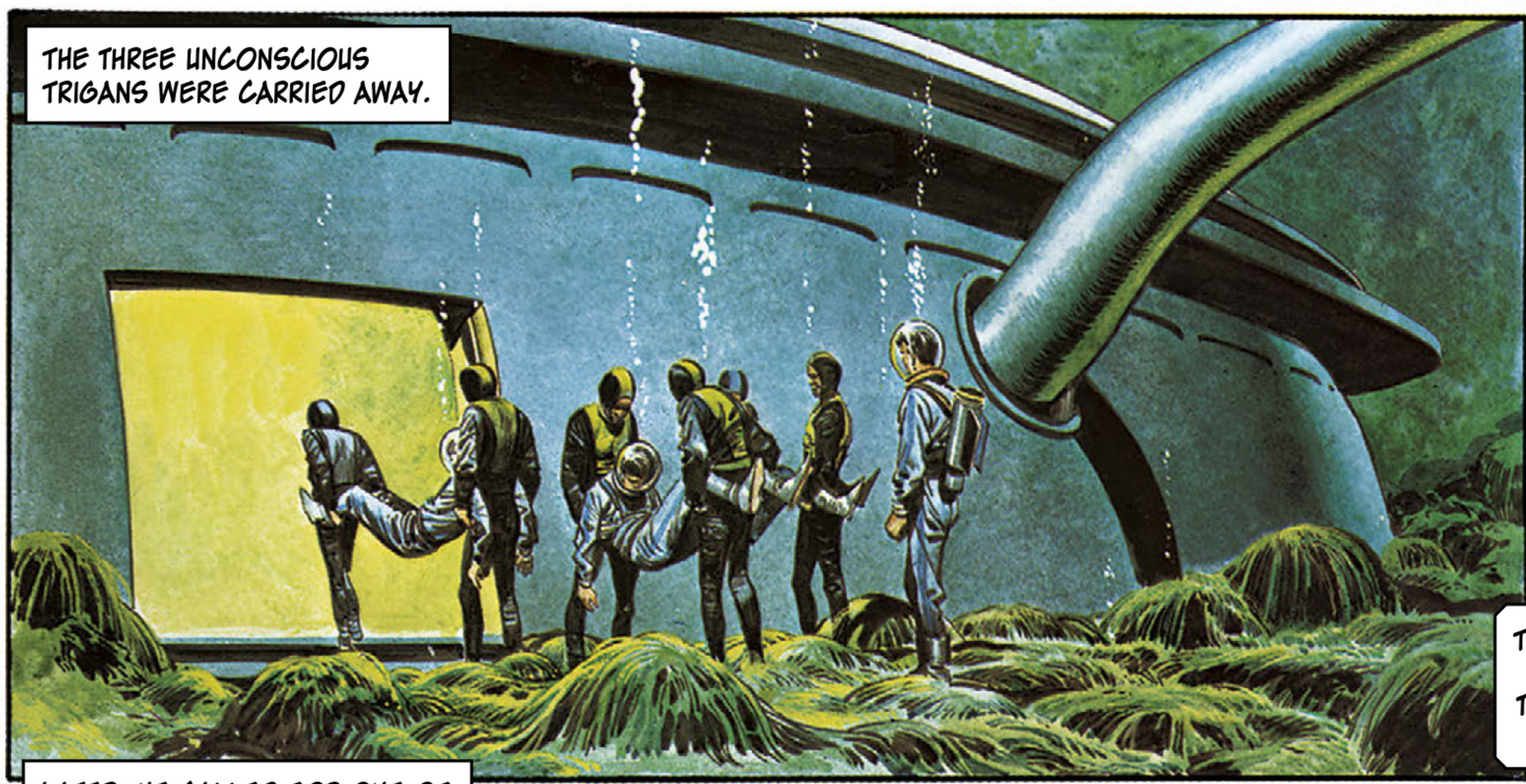
AFTER WHAT SEEMED AN ETERNITY, JANNO SIGNALLED HIS COMPANIONS TO HALT.


BEFORE THEIR EYES LAY THE SECRET THING THAT MENACED ELEKTON!

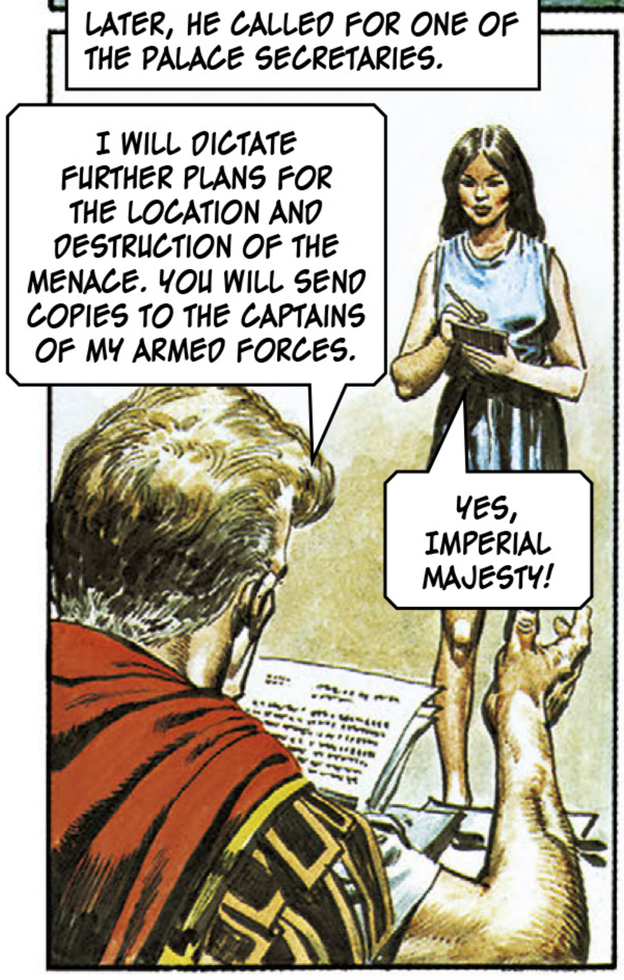
JANNO HAD SEEN ALL HE NEEDED TO KNOW. HE MADE THE PRE-ARRANGED SIGNAL FOR THEIR RETURN.

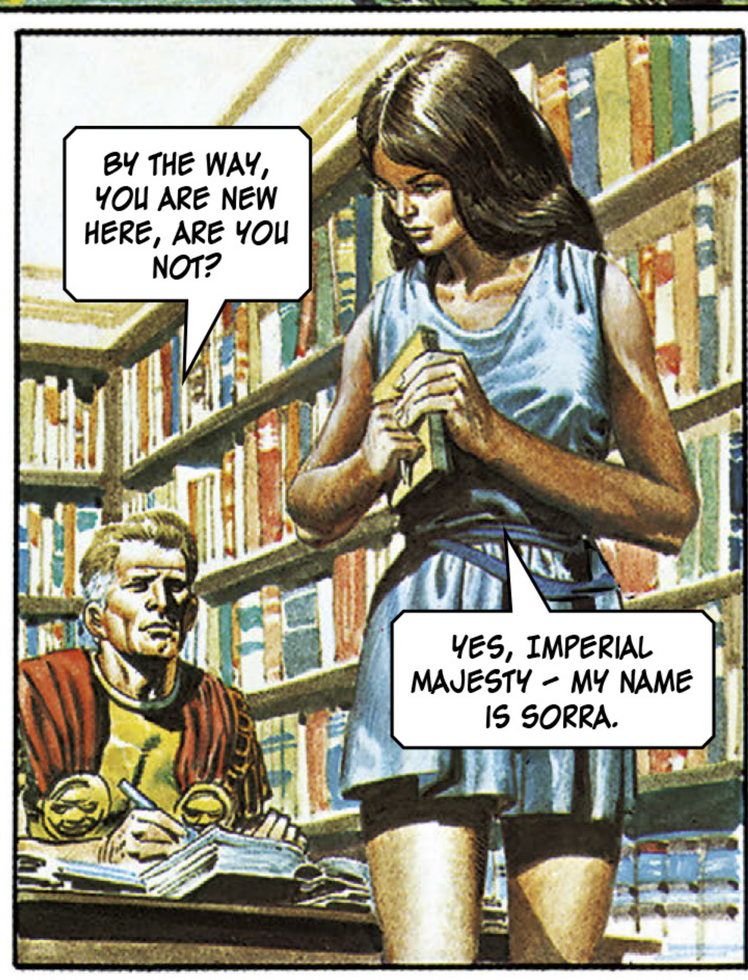

AND THEN, ZATTI RAISED HIS HANDS - KRAKKK-KRAKK! A STRANGE, STUNNING FORCE SPARKED OUT FROM HIS FINGERTIPS!


PRESENTLY, ALIEN FORMS EMERGED FROM THE MASSIVE SHAPE ON THE SEA-BED.

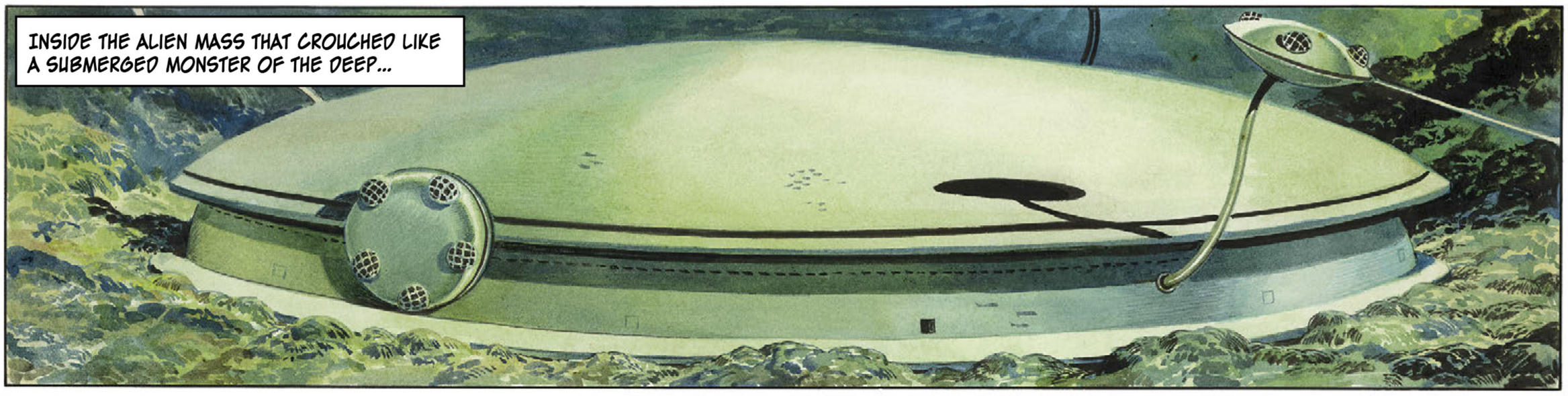

THE THREE UNCONSCIOUS TRIGANS WERE CARRIED AWAY.

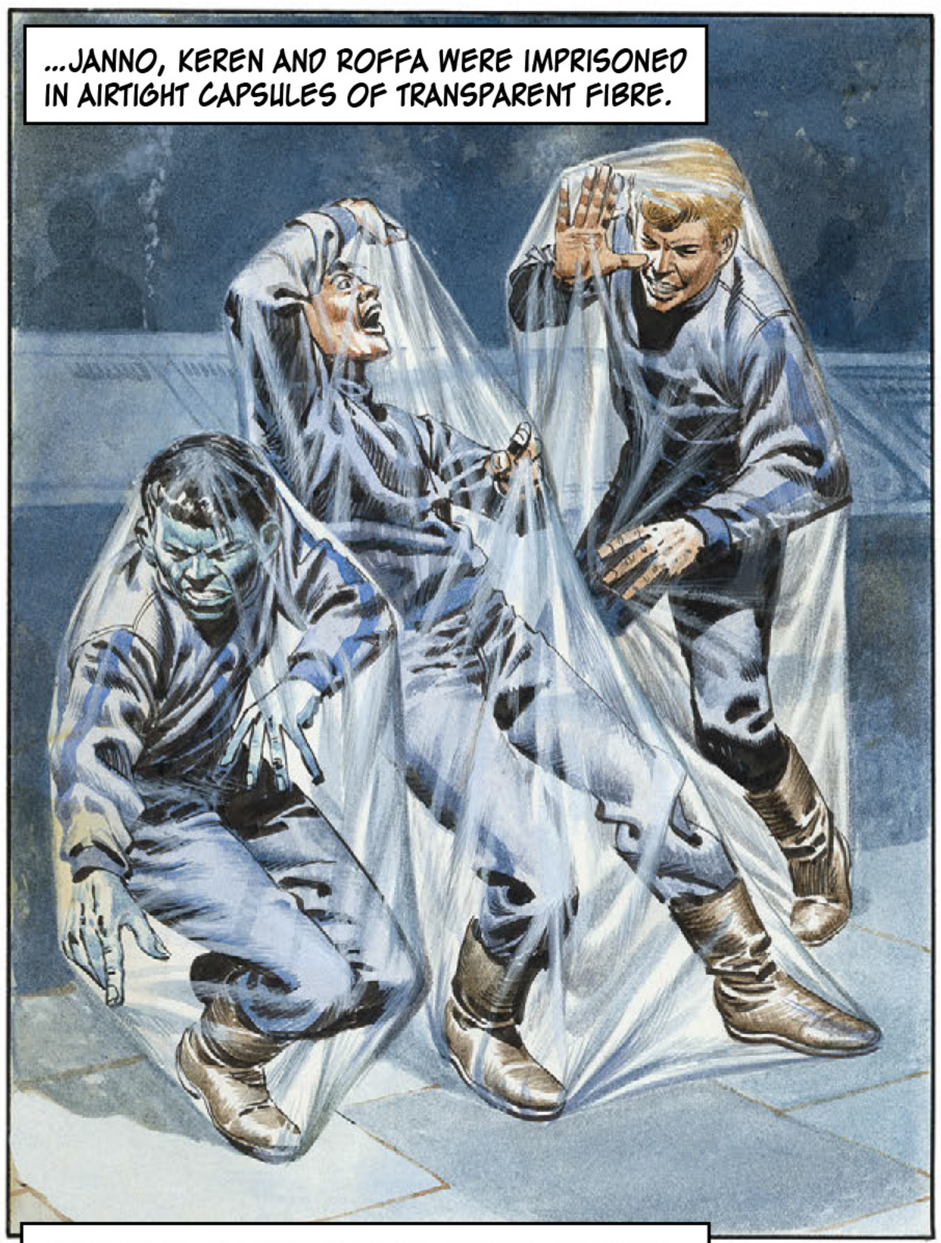
AFTER THREE DAYS HAD PASSED, THE EMPEROR SUMMONED HIS BROTHER, BRAG, WHO WAS JANNO'S FATHER.
THEY HAVE NOT RETURNED FROM THEIR MISSION. I FEAR WE MUST ACCEPT THAT JANNO AND HIS COMRADES HAVE PERISHED IN THE COURSE OF DUTY.

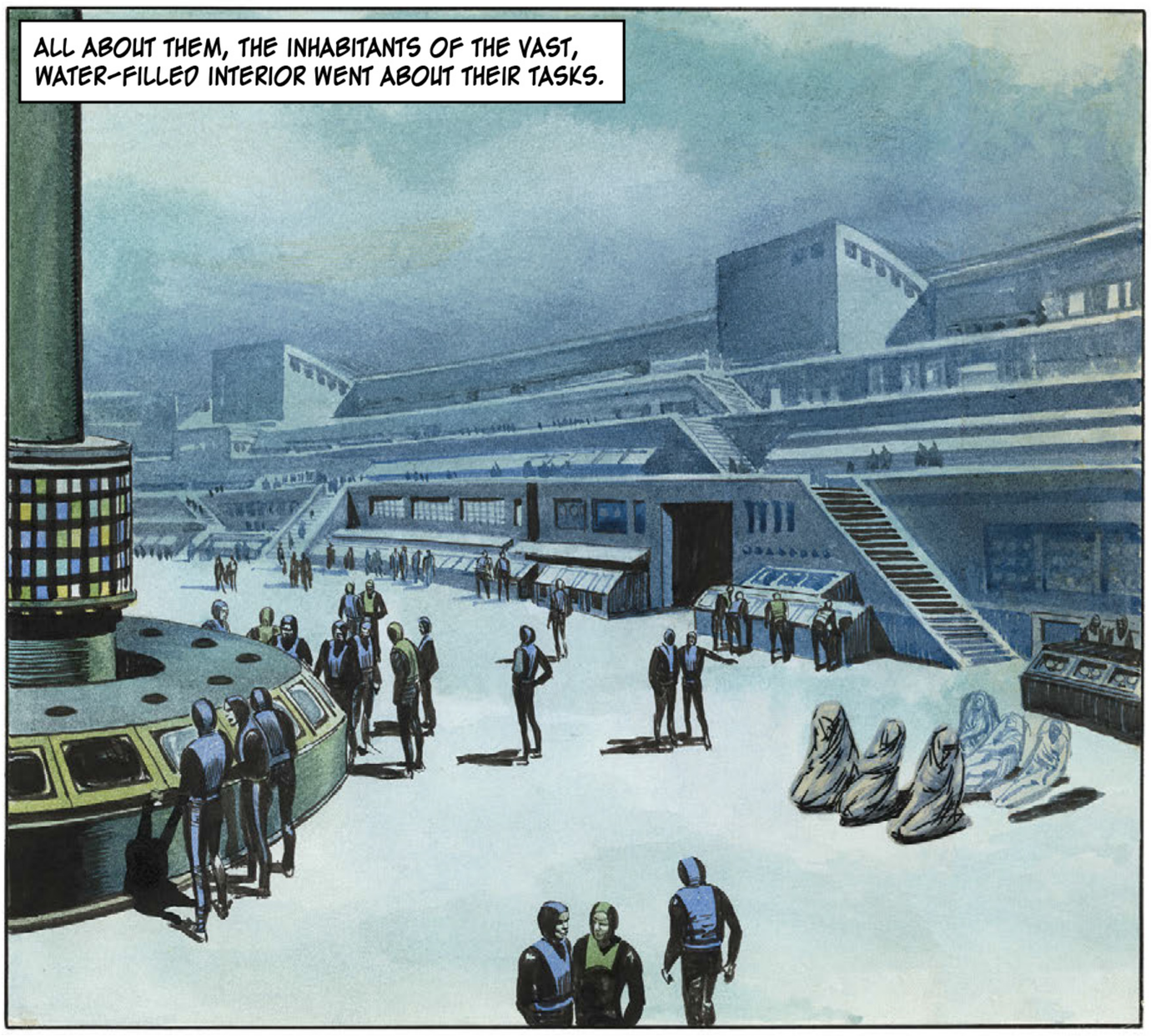

LATER, HE CALLED FOR ONE OF THE PALACE SECRETARIES.
I WILL DICTATE FURTHER PLANS FOR THE LOCATION AND DESTRUCTION OF THE MENACE. YOU WILL SEND COPIES TO THE CAPTAINS OF MY ARMED FORCES.
YES, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!


BY THE WAY, YOU ARE NEW HERE, ARE YOU NOT?
YES, IMPERIAL MAJESTY - MY NAME IS SORRA.

THAT NIGHT, THE GIRL CALLED SORRA SLEPT SUBMERGED IN THE WATER OF THE PALACE BATHS! SHE BELONGED TO THE SAME ALIEN RACE AS ZATTI!

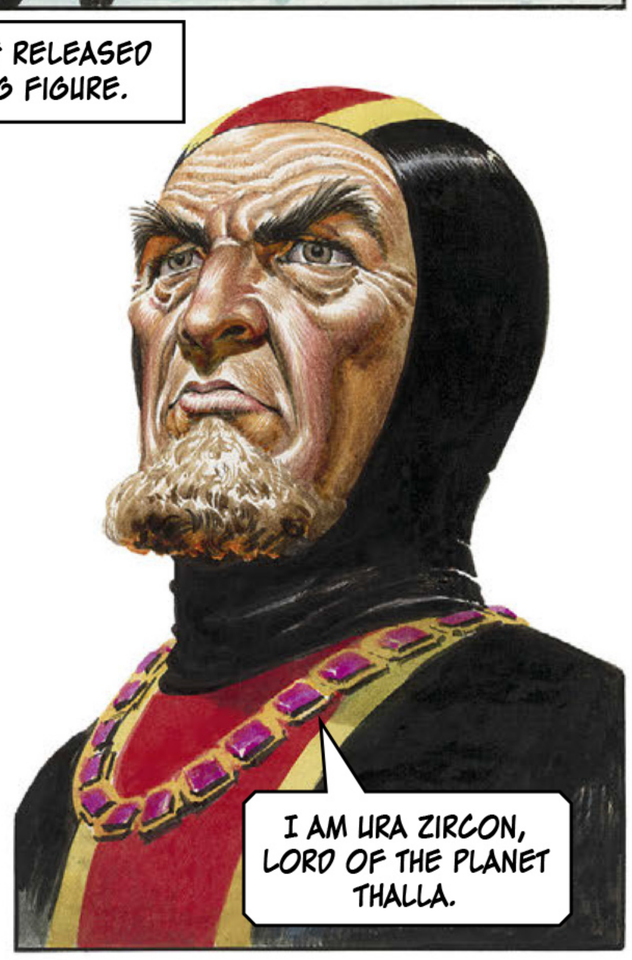

INSIDE THE ALIEN MASS THAT CROUCHED LIKE A SUBMERGED MONSTER OF THE DEEP...

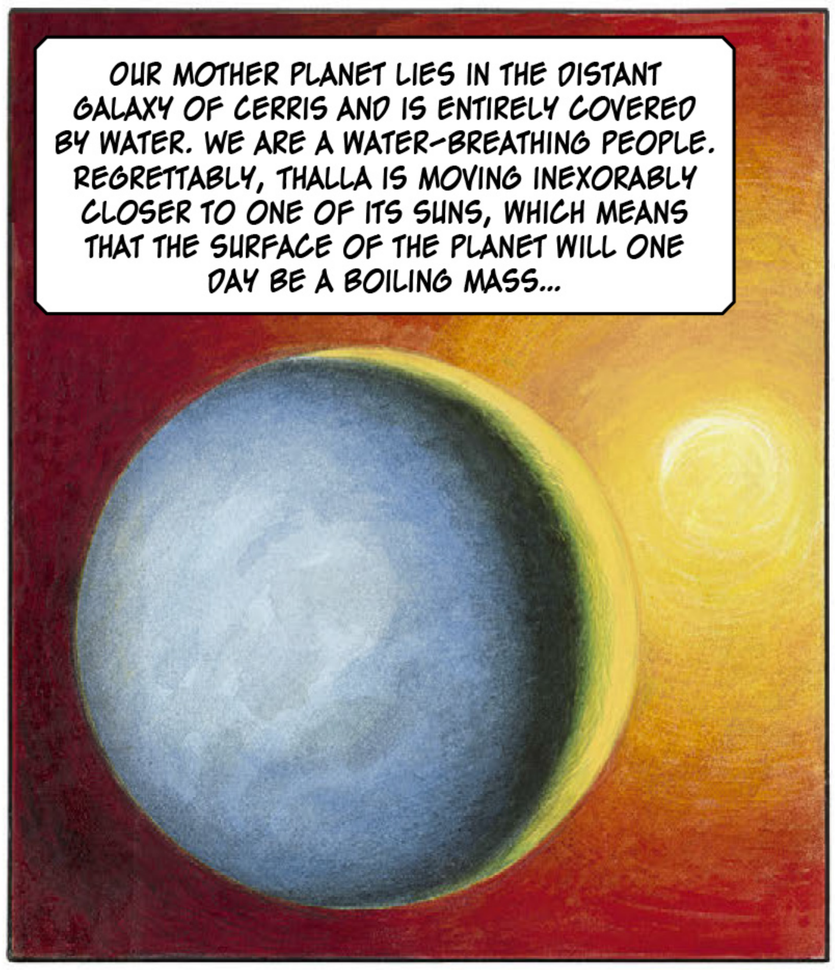

...JANNO, KEREN AND ROFFA WERE IMPRISONED IN AIRTIGHT CAPSULES OF TRANSPARENT FIBRE.

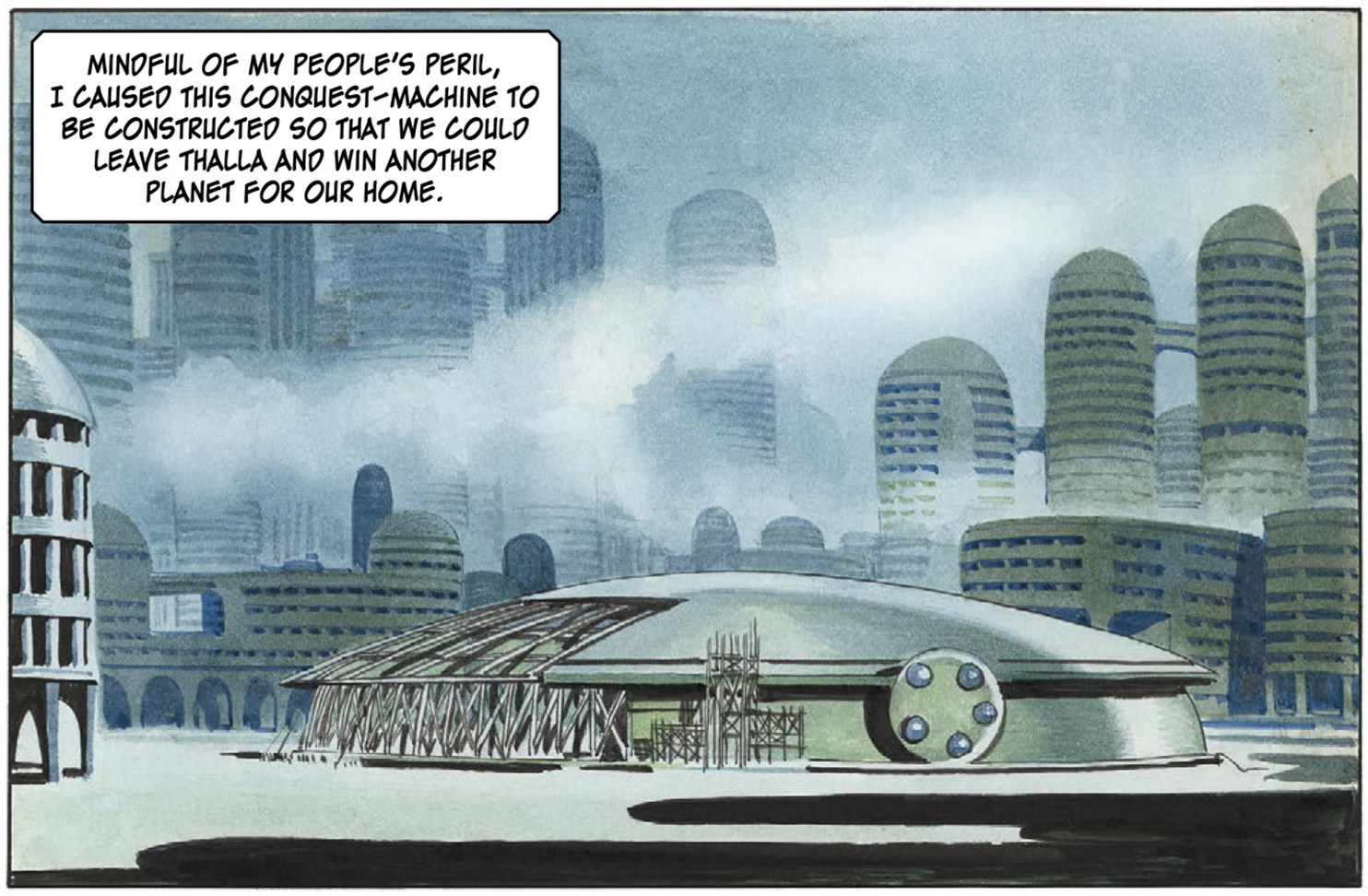

ALL ABOUT THEM, THE INHABITANTS OF THE VAST, WATER-FILLED INTERIOR WENT ABOUT THEIR TASKS.

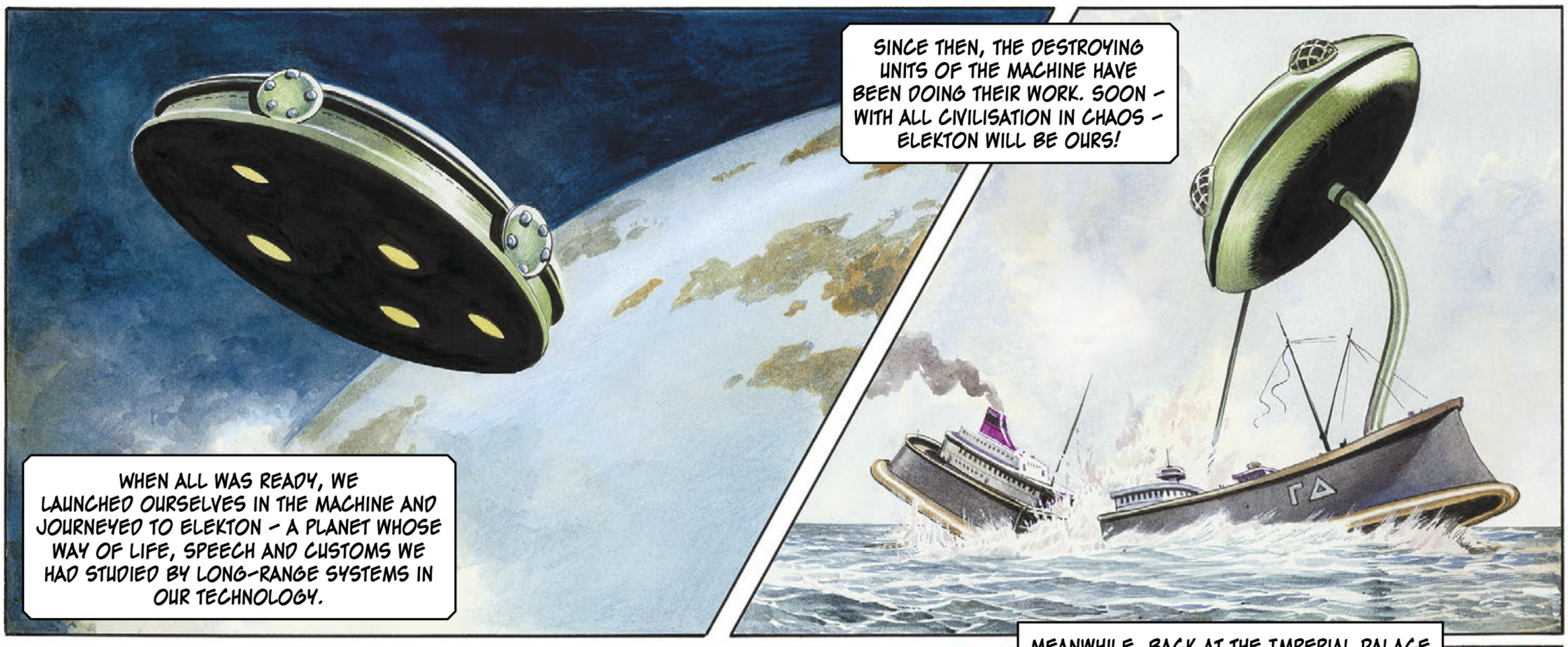
SUDDENLY, THE WATER LEVEL BEGAN TO DROP – AND THE STRANGE PEOPLE PLACED CURIOUSLY-SHAPED DEVICES INSIDE THEIR THROATS.

WHEN THE WATER HAD GONE, THE THREE CAPTIVES WERE RELEASED FROM THE CAPSULES AND LED TOWARDS A COMMANDING FIGURE.
SO! THE TRIGAN PRISONERS!
AND YOU ARE?

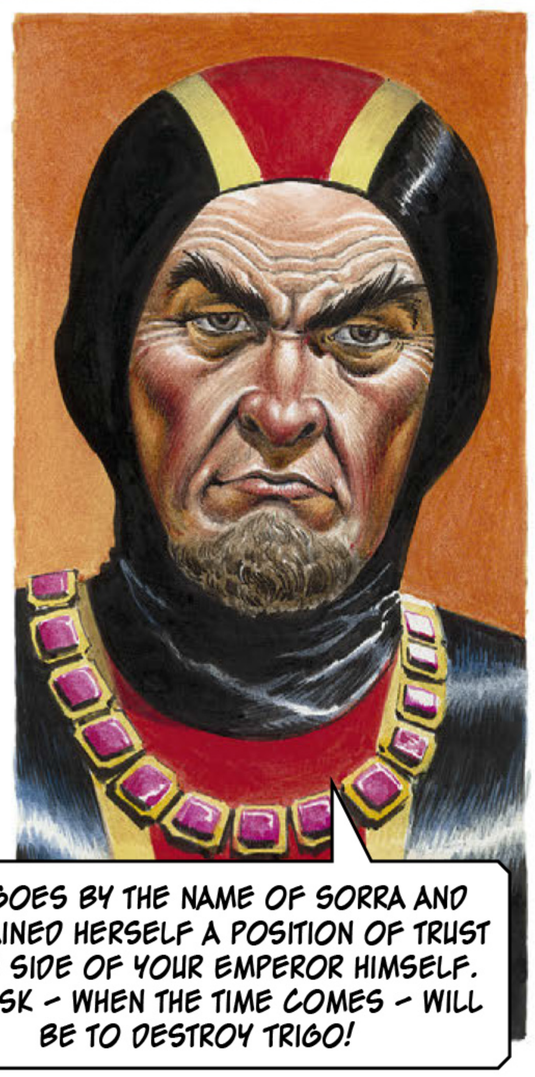

I AM URA ZIRCON, LORD OF THE PLANET THALLA.


OUR MOTHER PLANET LIES IN THE DISTANT GALAXY OF CERRIS AND IS ENTIRELY COVERED BY WATER. WE ARE A WATER-BREATHING PEOPLE. REGRETTABLY, THALLA IS MOVING INEXORABLY CLOSER TO ONE OF ITS SUNS, WHICH MEANS THAT THE SURFACE OF THE PLANET WILL ONE DAY BE A BOILING MASS...

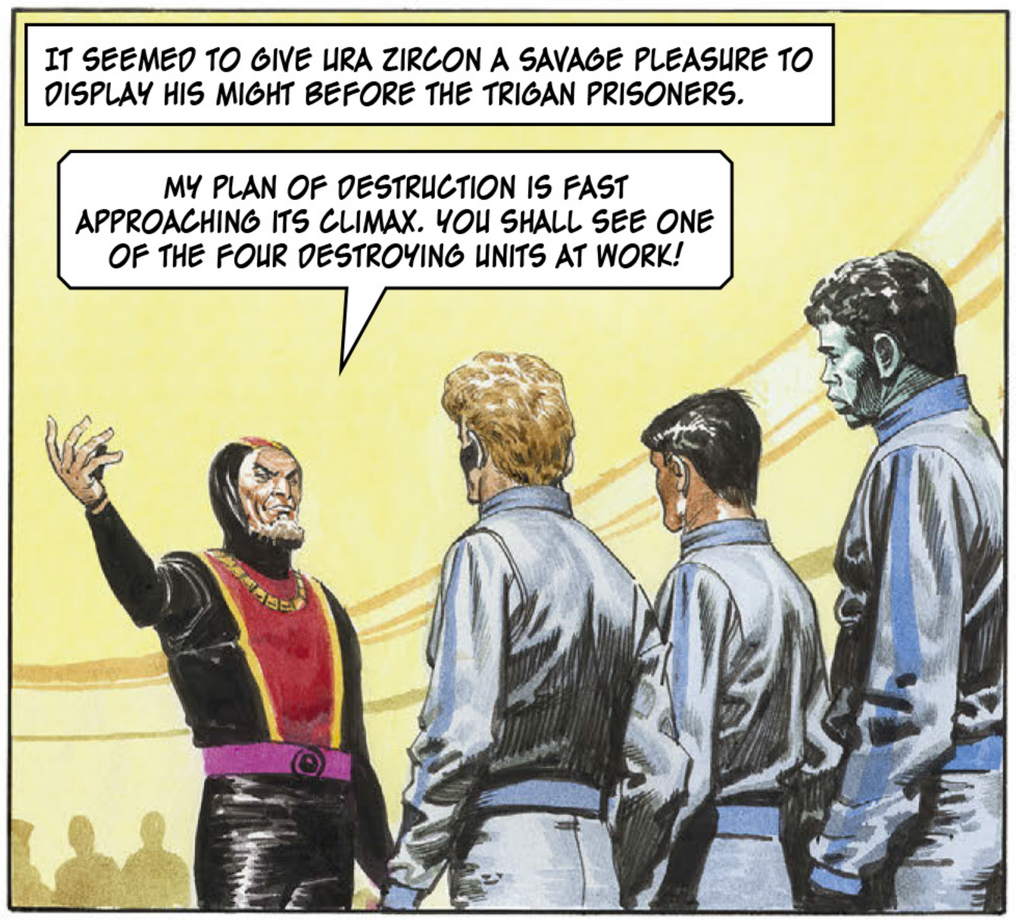

MINDFUL OF MY PEOPLE'S PERIL, I CAUSED THIS CONQUEST-MACHINE TO BE CONSTRUCTED SO THAT WE COULD LEAVE THALLA AND WIN ANOTHER PLANET FOR OUR HOME.

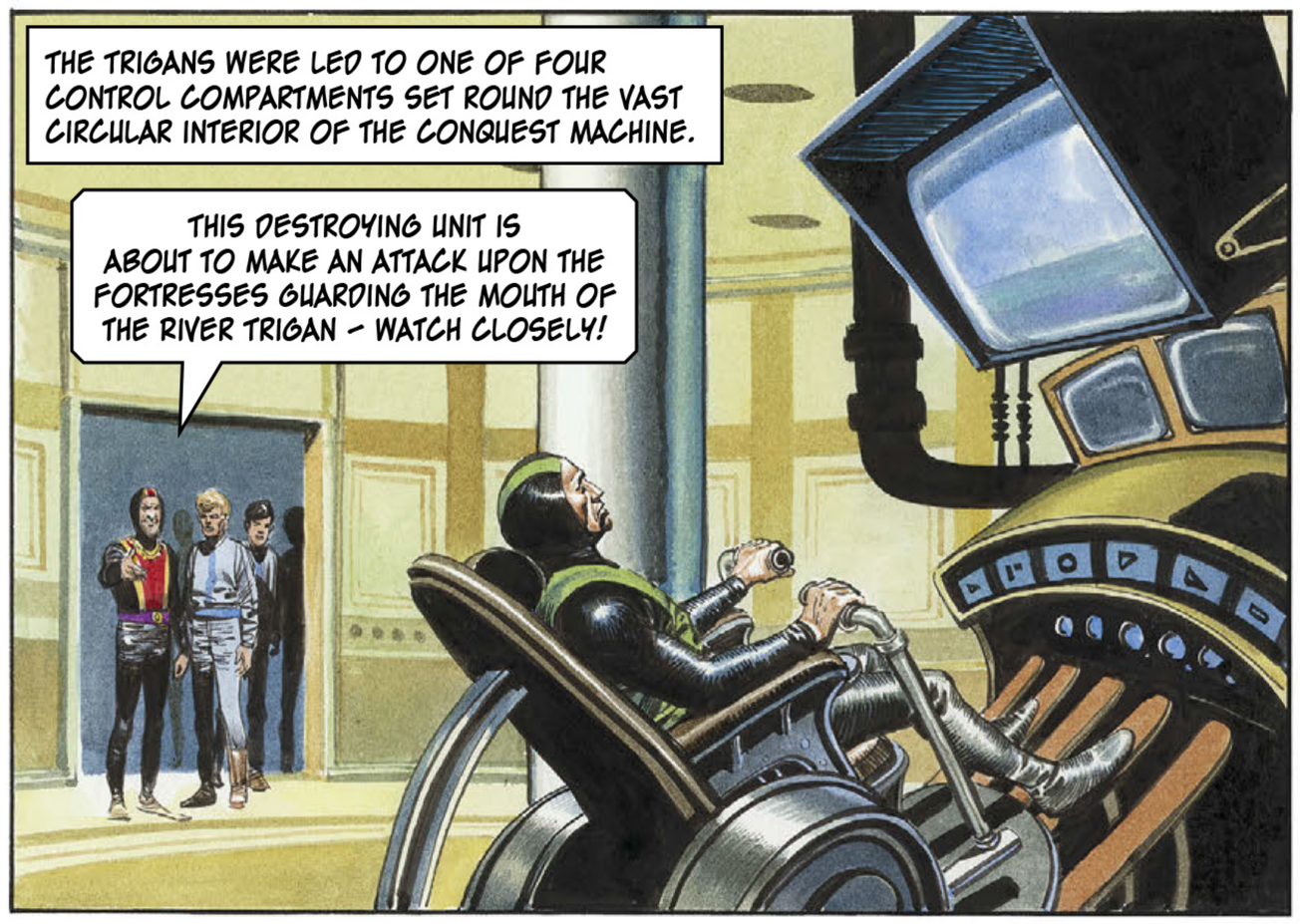

WHEN ALL WAS READY, WE LAUNCHED OURSELVES IN THE MACHINE AND JOURNEYED TO ELEKTON – A PLANET WHOSE WAY OF LIFE, SPEECH AND CUSTOMS WE HAD STUDIED BY LONG-RANGE SYSTEMS IN OUR TECHNOLOGY.
SINCE THEN, THE DESTROYING UNITS OF THE MACHINE HAVE BEEN DOING THEIR WORK. SOON – WITH ALL CIVILISATION IN CHAOS – ELEKTON WILL BE OURS!

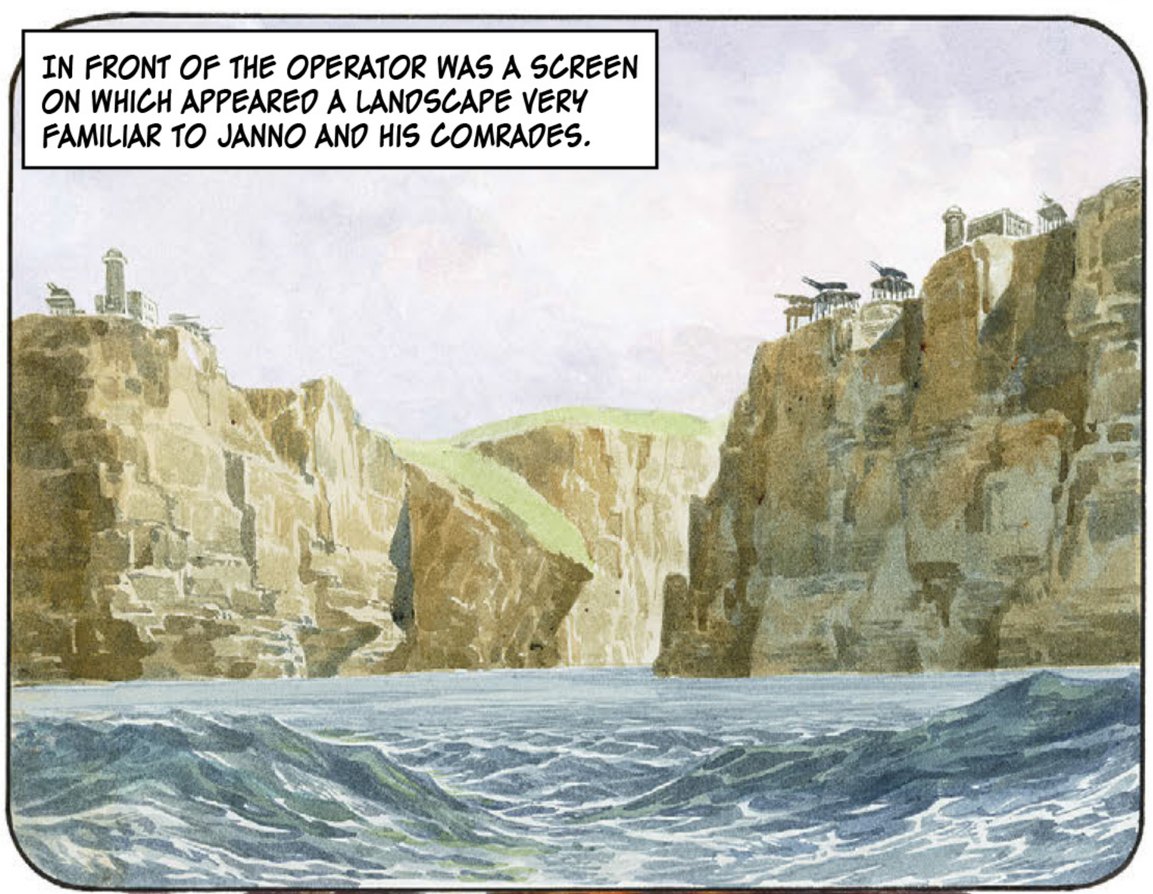
THE THREE TRIGANS LISTENED IN AWE AND ALARM TO THE REST OF URA ZIRCON'S SPEECH.
ARMED WITH DEVICES WHICH ENABLE THEM TO BREATHE OUT OF WATER, UNITS OF MY PEOPLE HAVE INFILTRATED INTO THE TOWNS AND CITIES OF THE SURFACE. MY OWN DAUGHTER IN AMONGST THEM...

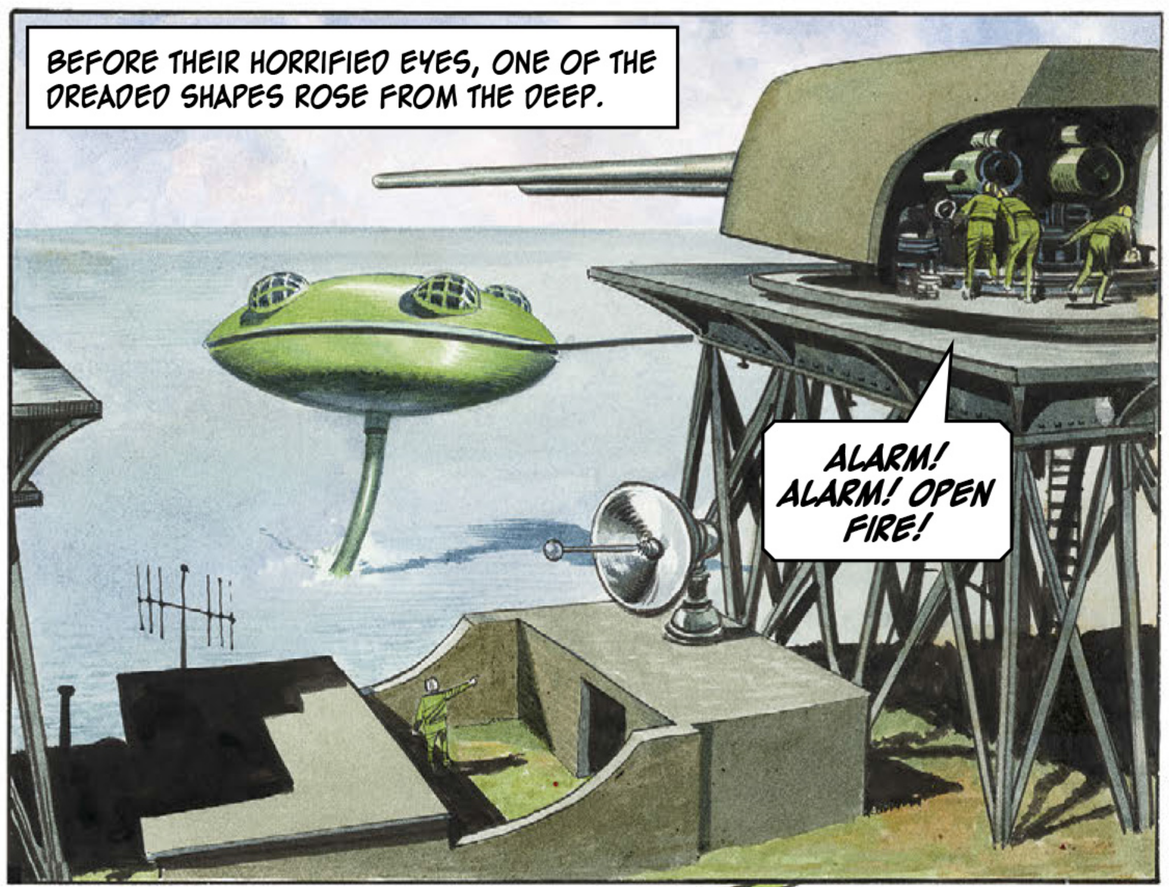

SHE GOES BY THE NAME OF SORRA AND HAS GAINED HERSELF A POSITION OF TRUST AT THE SIDE OF YOUR EMPEROR HIMSELF. HER TASK – WHEN THE TIME COMES – WILL BE TO DESTROY TRIGO!

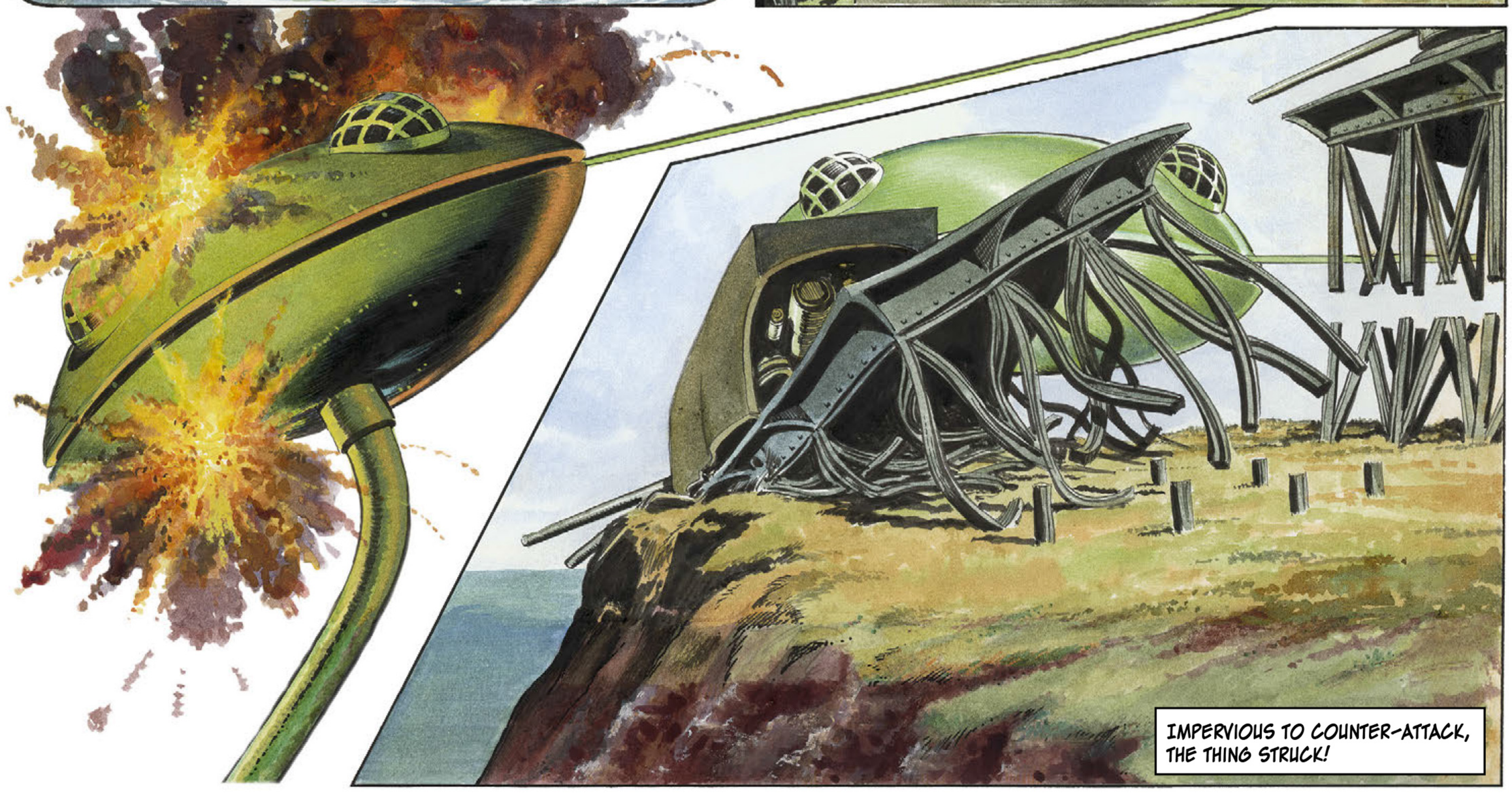
MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE AT TRIGAN CITY, THE EMPEROR TRIGO SPOKE APPROVINGLY TO HIS NEW SECRETARY.
YOU HAVE DONE WELL, SORRA. I AM PLEASED WITH YOU.
YOU ARE TOO KIND, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

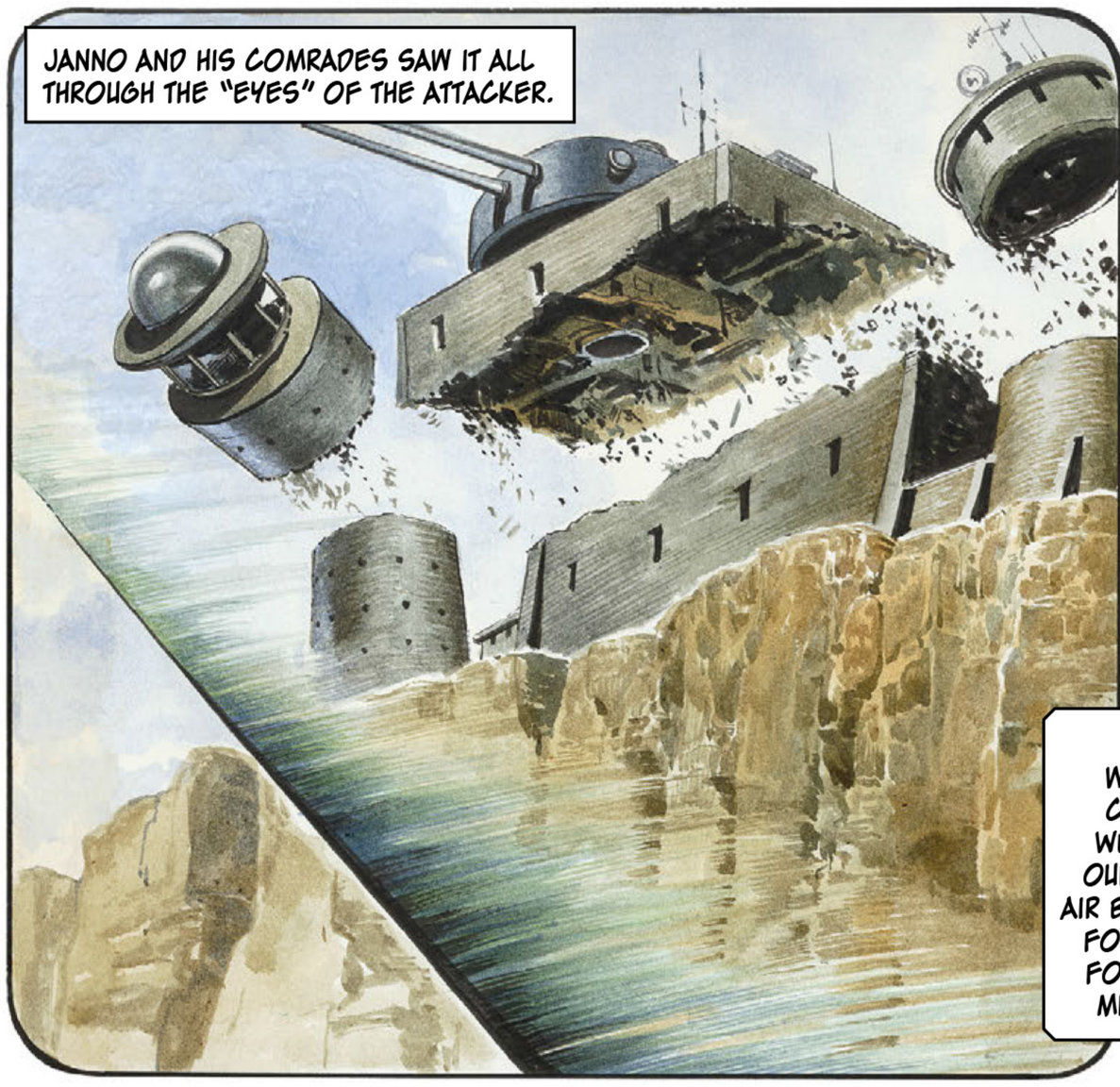

IT SEEMED TO GIVE URA ZIRCON A SAVAGE PLEASURE TO DISPLAY HIS MIGHT BEFORE THE TRIGAN PRISONERS.
MY PLAN OF DESTRUCTION IS FAST APPROACHING ITS CLIMAX. YOU SHALL SEE ONE OF THE FOUR DESTROYING UNITS AT WORK!


THE TRIGANS WERE LED TO ONE OF FOUR CONTROL COMPARTMENTS SET ROUND THE VAST CIRCULAR INTERIOR OF THE CONQUEST MACHINE.
THIS DESTROYING UNIT IS ABOUT TO MAKE AN ATTACK UPON THE FORTRESSES GUARDING THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER TRIGAN – WATCH CLOSELY!

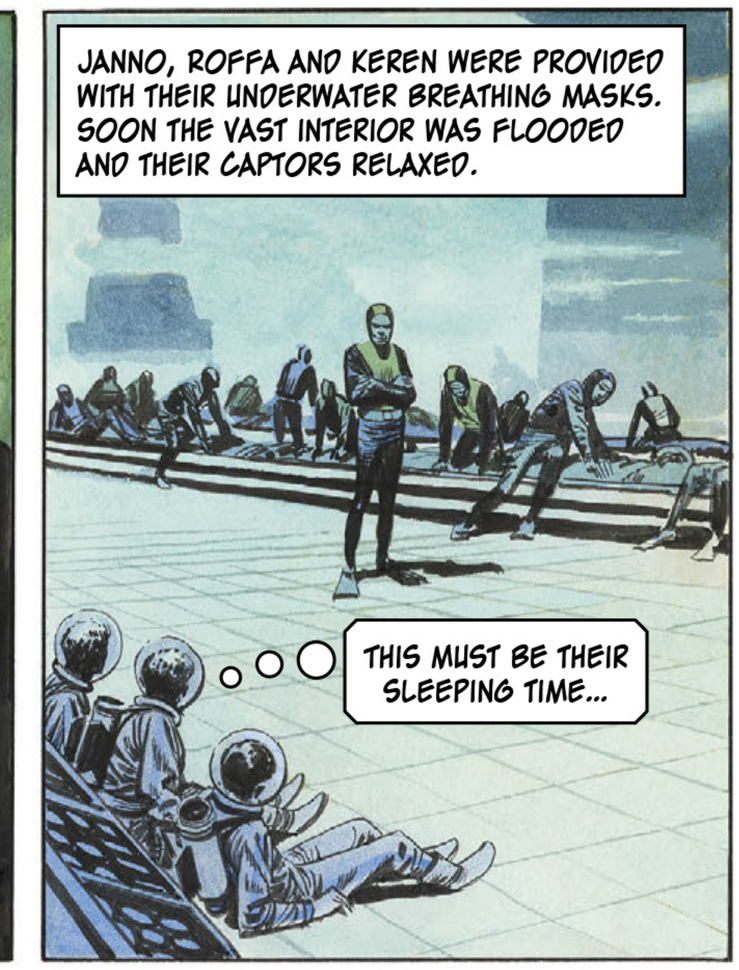

IN FRONT OF THE OPERATOR WAS A SCREEN ON WHICH APPEARED A LANDSCAPE VERY FAMILIAR TO JANNO AND HIS COMRADES.


BEFORE THEIR HORRIFIED EYES, ONE OF THE DREADED SHAPES ROSE FROM THE DEEP.
ALARM! ALARM! OPEN FIRE!


IMPERVIOUS TO COUNTER-ATTACK, THE THING STRUCK!

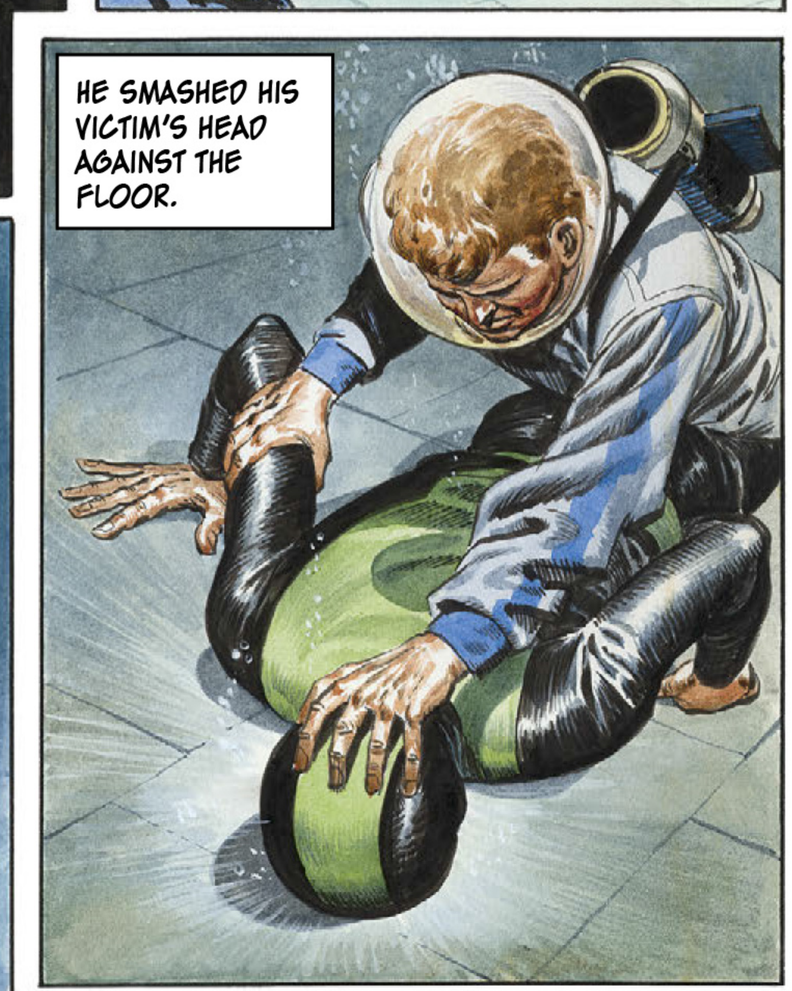

JANNO AND HIS COMRADES SAW IT ALL THROUGH THE "EYES" OF THE ATTACKER.

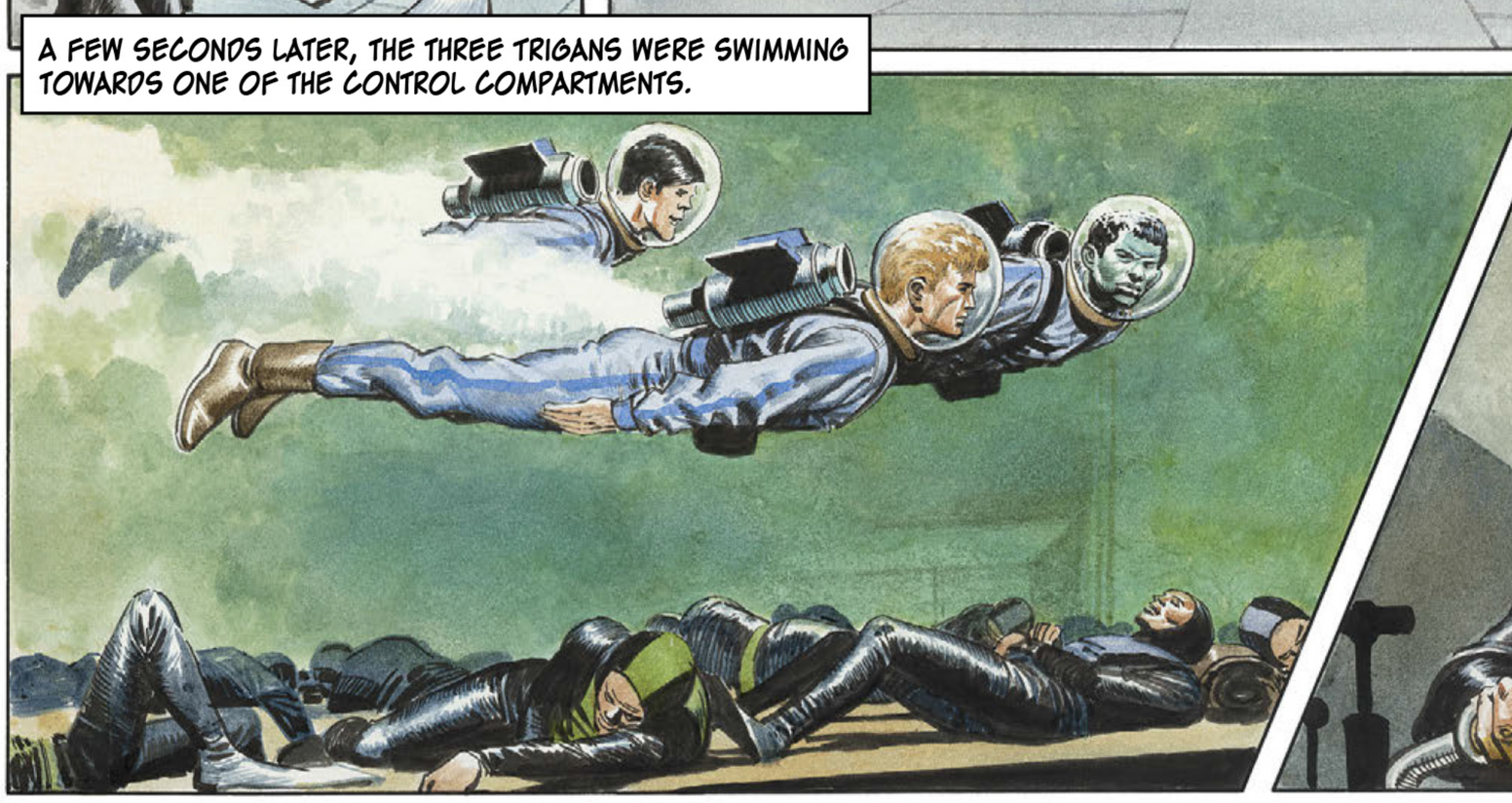
SO! AND NOW WE MUST FLOOD THE CONQUEST MACHINE. WE ARE FAMILIARISING OURSELVES TO BREATHE AIR BUT OUR DEVICES WORK FOR ONLY HALF A DAY – FOR THE REMAINDER WE MUST BREATHE WATER.


JANNO, ROFFA AND KEREN WERE PROVIDED WITH THEIR UNDERWATER BREATHING MASKS. SOON THE VAST INTERIOR WAS FLOODED AND THEIR CAPTORS RELAXED.
THIS MUST BE THEIR SLEEPING TIME...

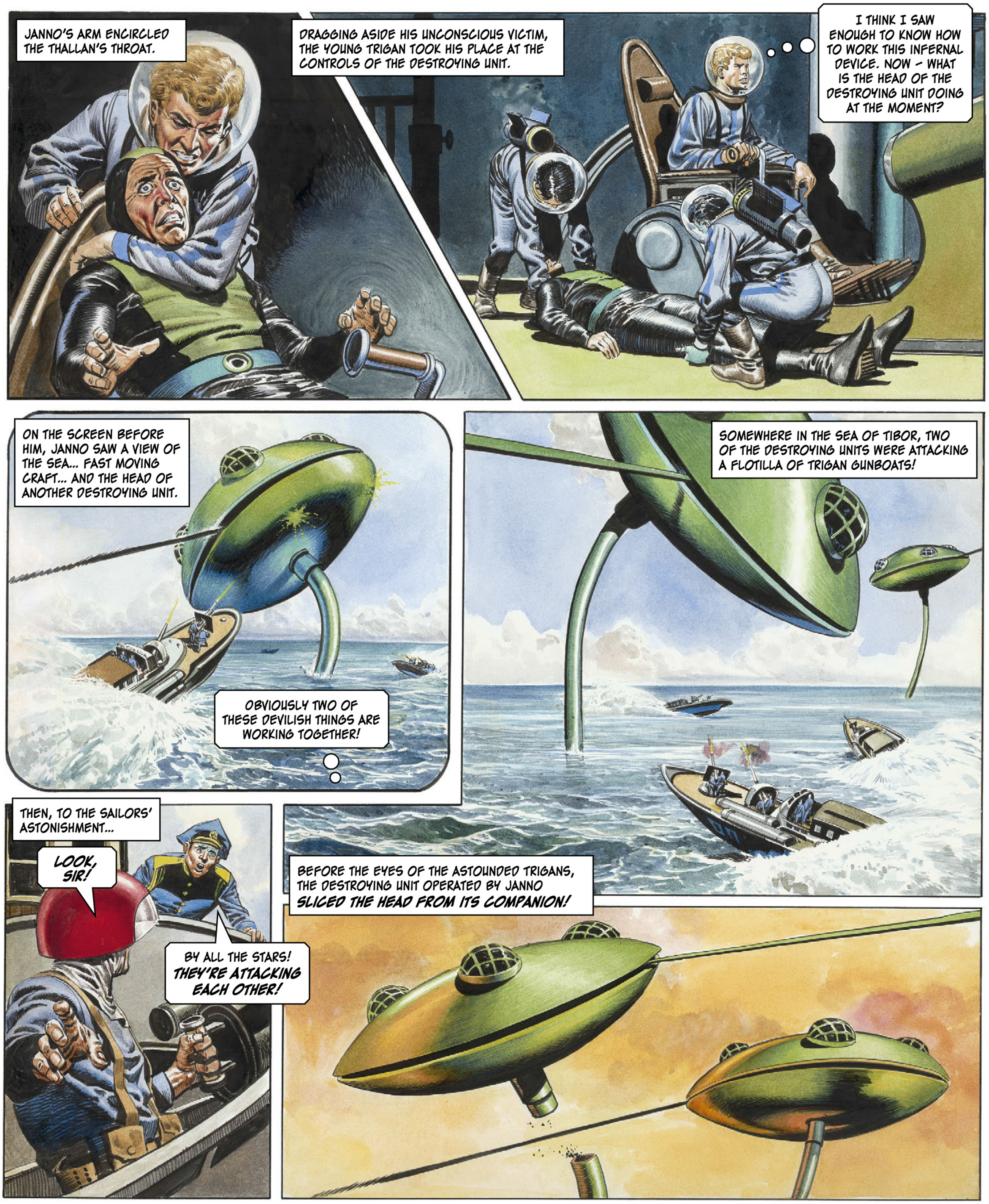
OUR GUARD ISN'T ARMED – BUT I KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE THAT THESE BRUTES HAVE SOME FIENDISH MEANS OF DESTRUCTION!

JANNO DIVED TOWARDS THE GUARD, DODGING THE FORKED LIGHT WHICH SEARED THE WATER.

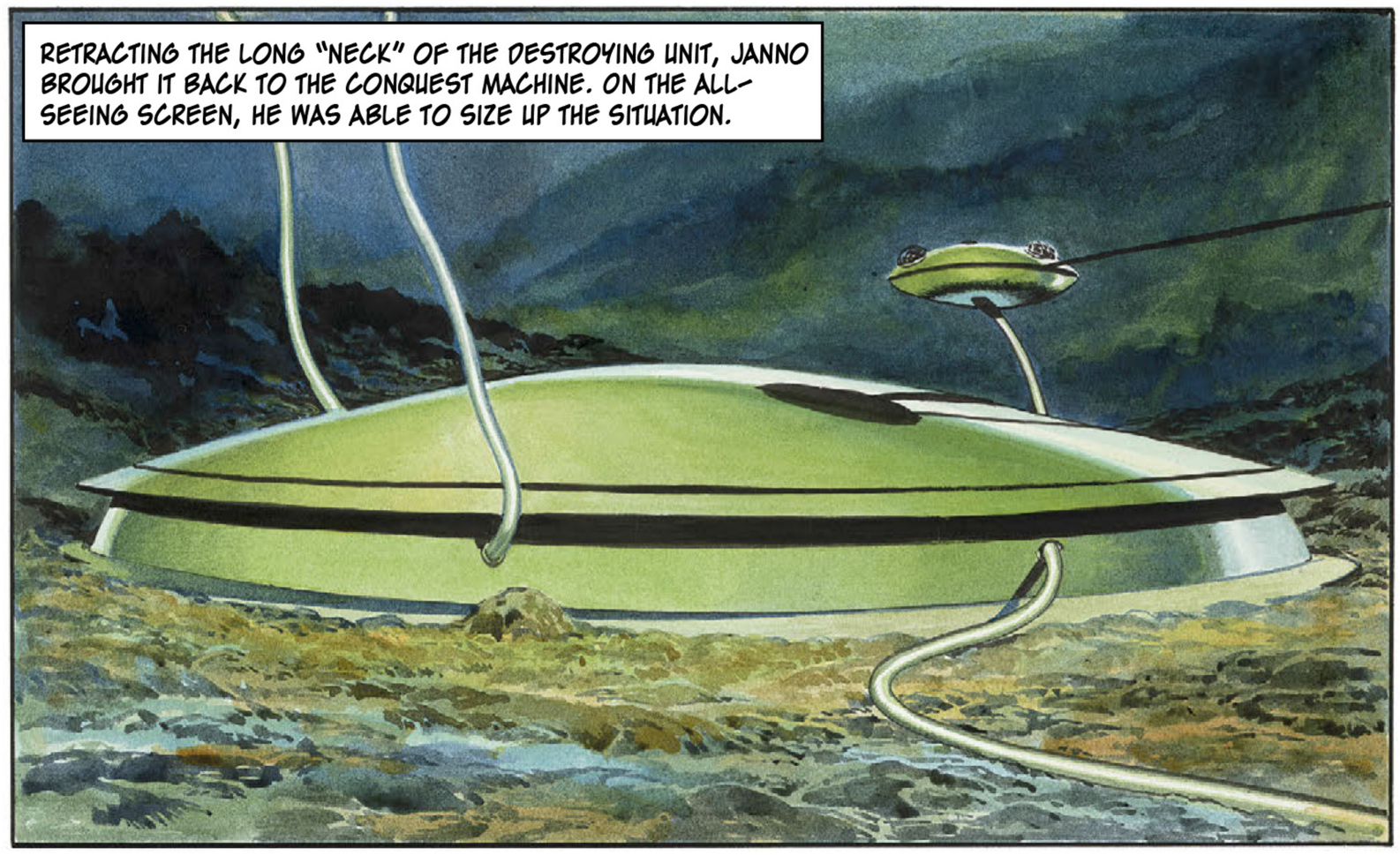

HE SMASHED HIS VICTIM'S HEAD AGAINST THE FLOOR.

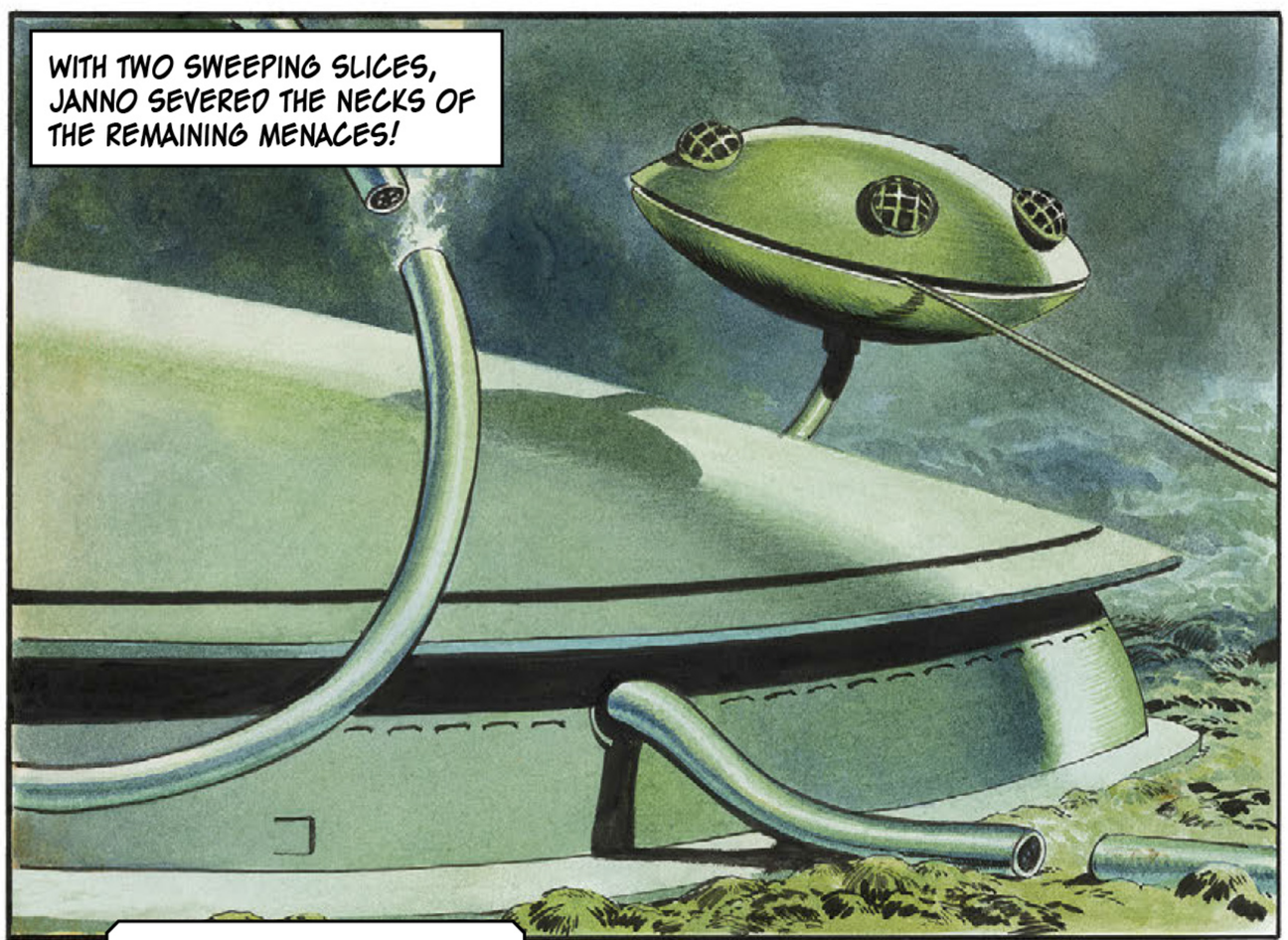

A FEW SECONDS LATER, THE THREE TRIGANS WERE SWIMMING TOWARDS ONE OF THE CONTROL COMPARTMENTS.

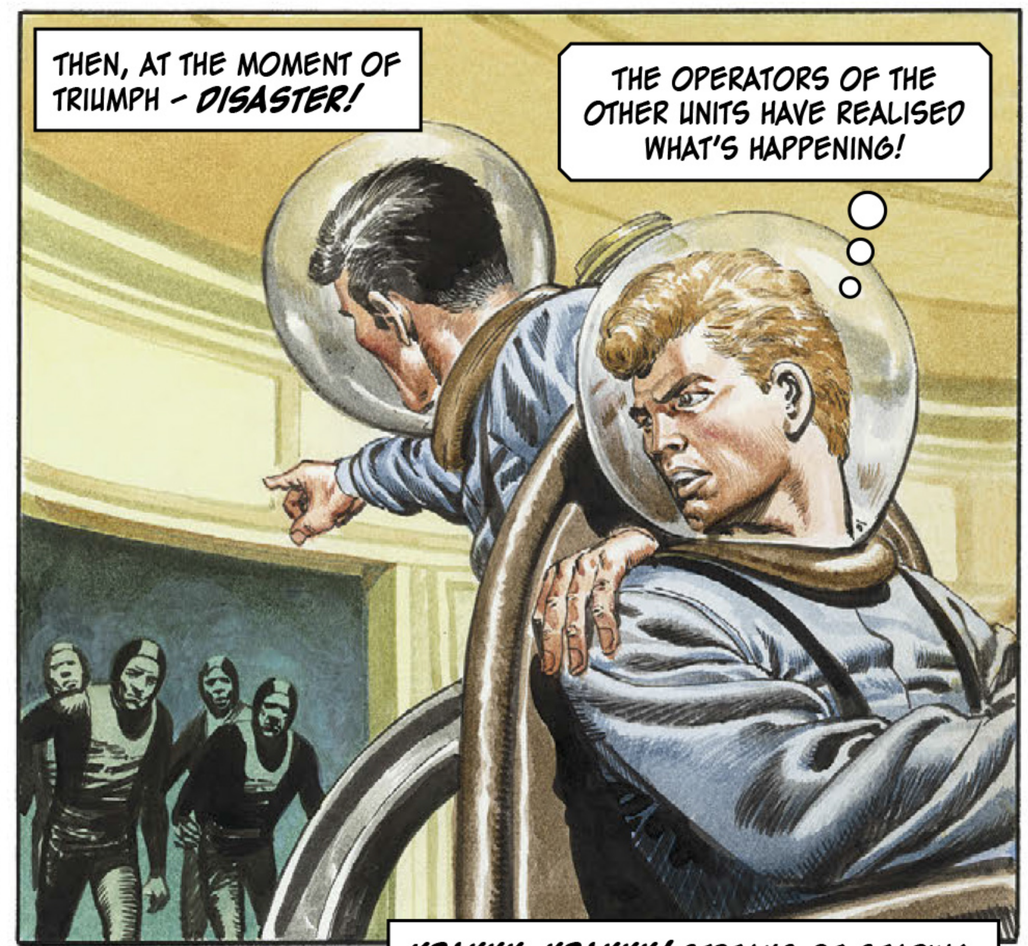
NOW! WE'LL PUT THAT DESTROYING MACHINE TO OUR OWN USE!


JANNO'S ARM ENCIRCLED THE THALLAN'S THROAT.
DRAGGING ASIDE HIS UNCONSCIOUS VICTIM, THE YOUNG TRIGAN TOOK HIS PLACE AT THE CONTROLS OF THE DESTROYING UNIT.
I THINK I SAW ENOUGH TO KNOW HOW TO WORK THIS INFERNAL DEVICE. NOW – WHAT IS THE HEAD OF THE DESTROYING UNIT DOING AT THE MOMENT?
ON THE SCREEN BEFORE HIM, JANNO SAW A VIEW OF THE SEA... FAST MOVING CRAFT... AND THE HEAD OF ANOTHER DESTROYING UNIT.
OBVIOUSLY TWO OF THESE DEVILISH THINGS ARE WORKING TOGETHER!
SOMEWHERE IN THE SEA OF TIBOR, TWO OF THE DESTROYING UNITS WERE ATTACKING A FLOTILLA OF TRIGAN GUNBOATS!
THEN, TO THE SAILORS' ASTONISHMENT...
LOOK, SIR!
BY ALL THE STARS! THEY'RE ATTACKING EACH OTHER!
BEFORE THE EYES OF THE ASTOUNDED TRIGANS, THE DESTROYING UNIT OPERATED BY JANNO SLICED THE HEAD FROM ITS COMPANION!

JANNO'S EYES DANCED WITH TRIUMPH.
SO MUCH FOR THAT. NOW TO DESTROY THE OTHER TWO!

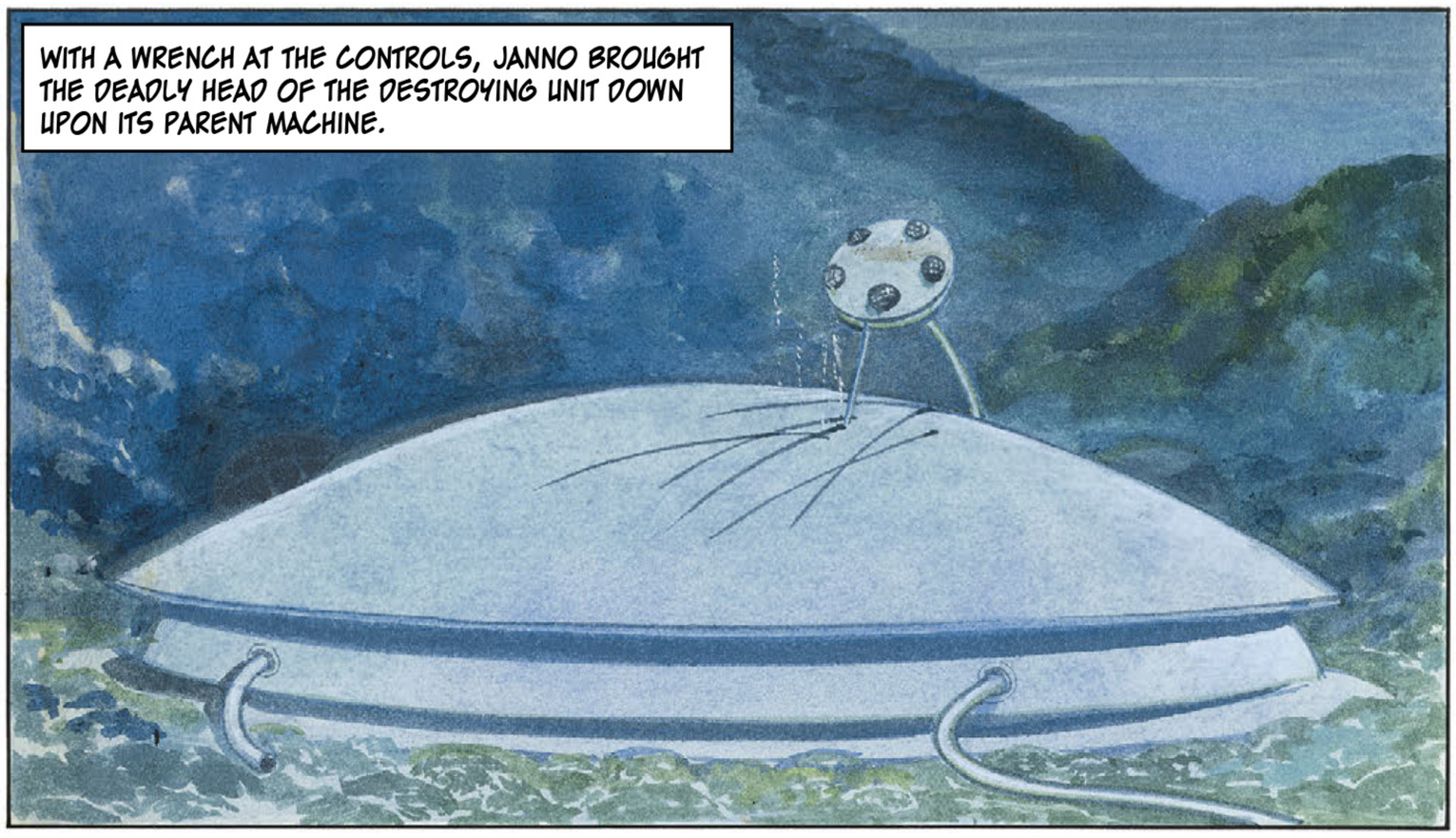

RETRACTING THE LONG "NECK" OF THE DESTROYING UNIT, JANNO BROUGHT IT BACK TO THE CONQUEST MACHINE. ON THE ALL-SEEING SCREEN, HE WAS ABLE TO SIZE UP THE SITUATION.


WITH TWO SWEEPING SLICES, JANNO SEVERED THE NECKS OF THE REMAINING MENACES!

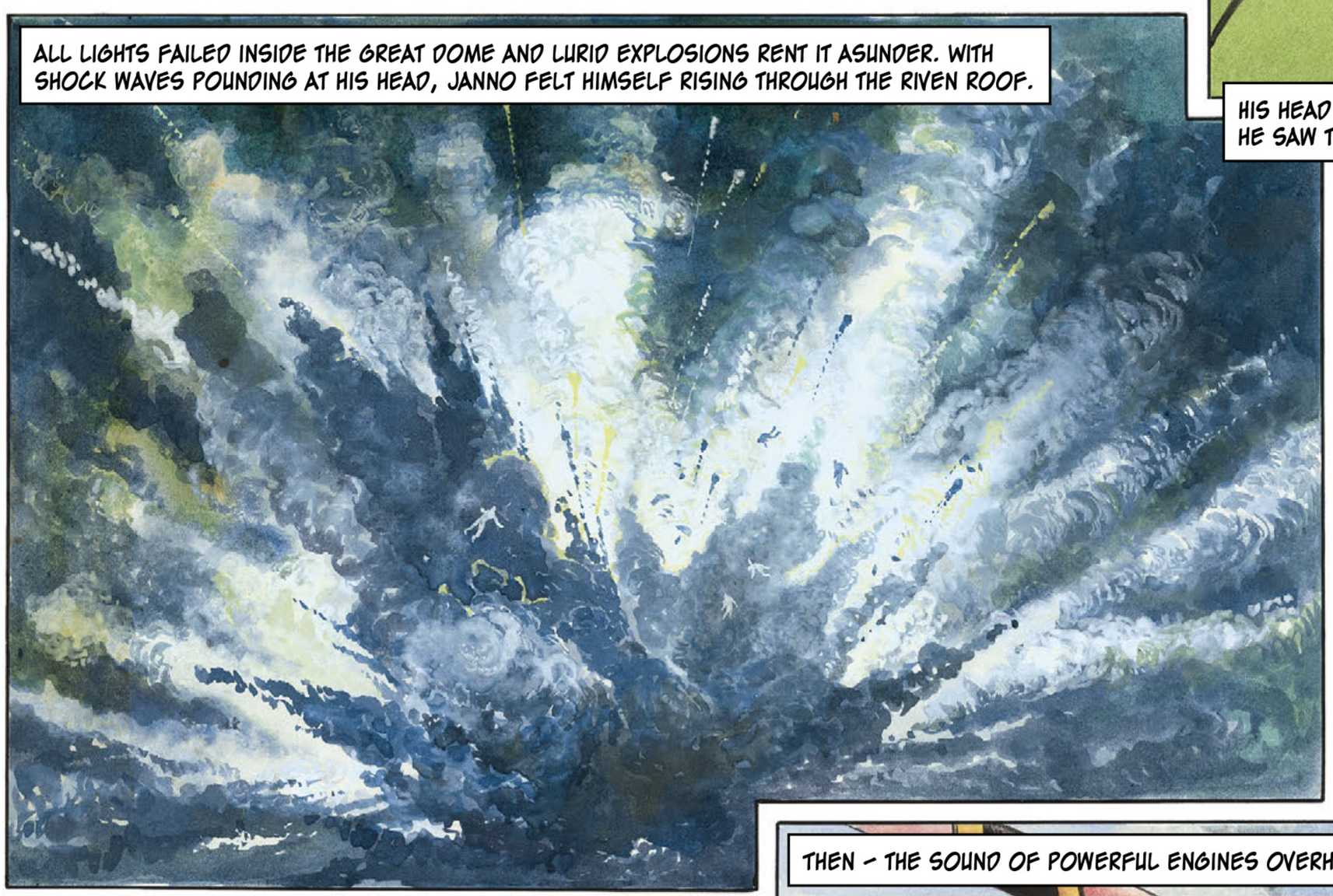

THEN, AT THE MOMENT OF TRIUMPH – DISASTER!
THE OPERATORS OF THE OTHER UNITS HAVE REALISED WHAT'S HAPPENING!

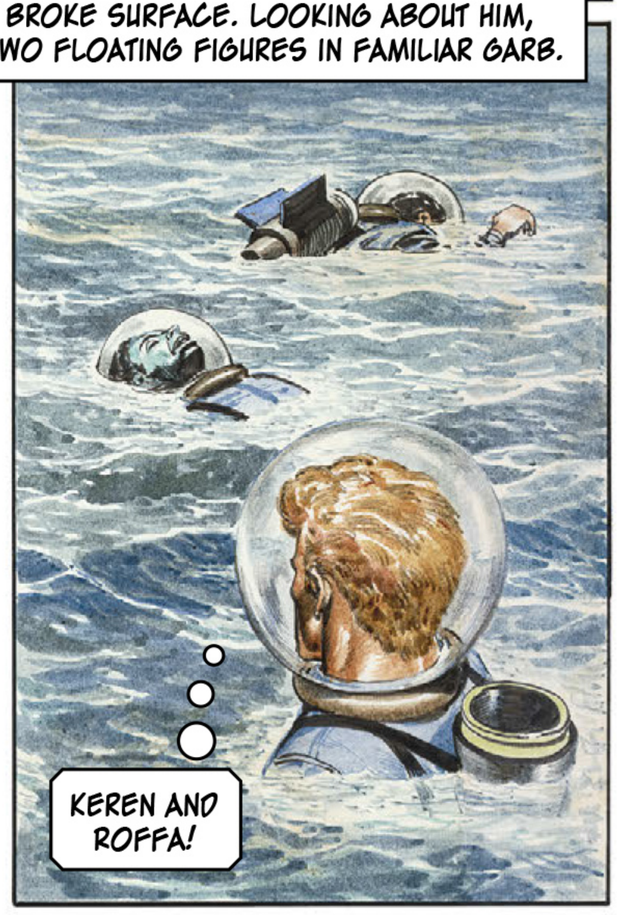
DO I HAVE TIME TO DESTROY THE CONQUEST MACHINE ITSELF?

AS THE FIRST OF THE THALLANS ENTERED THE CONTROL COMPARTMENT, KEREN AND ROFFA LAUNCHED THEMSELVES FORWARD TO THE ATTACK.
KRAKKK-KRAKKK! STREAKS OF SEARING LIGHT DASHED THE TWO GALLANT TRIGANS TO UNCONSCIOUSNESS!

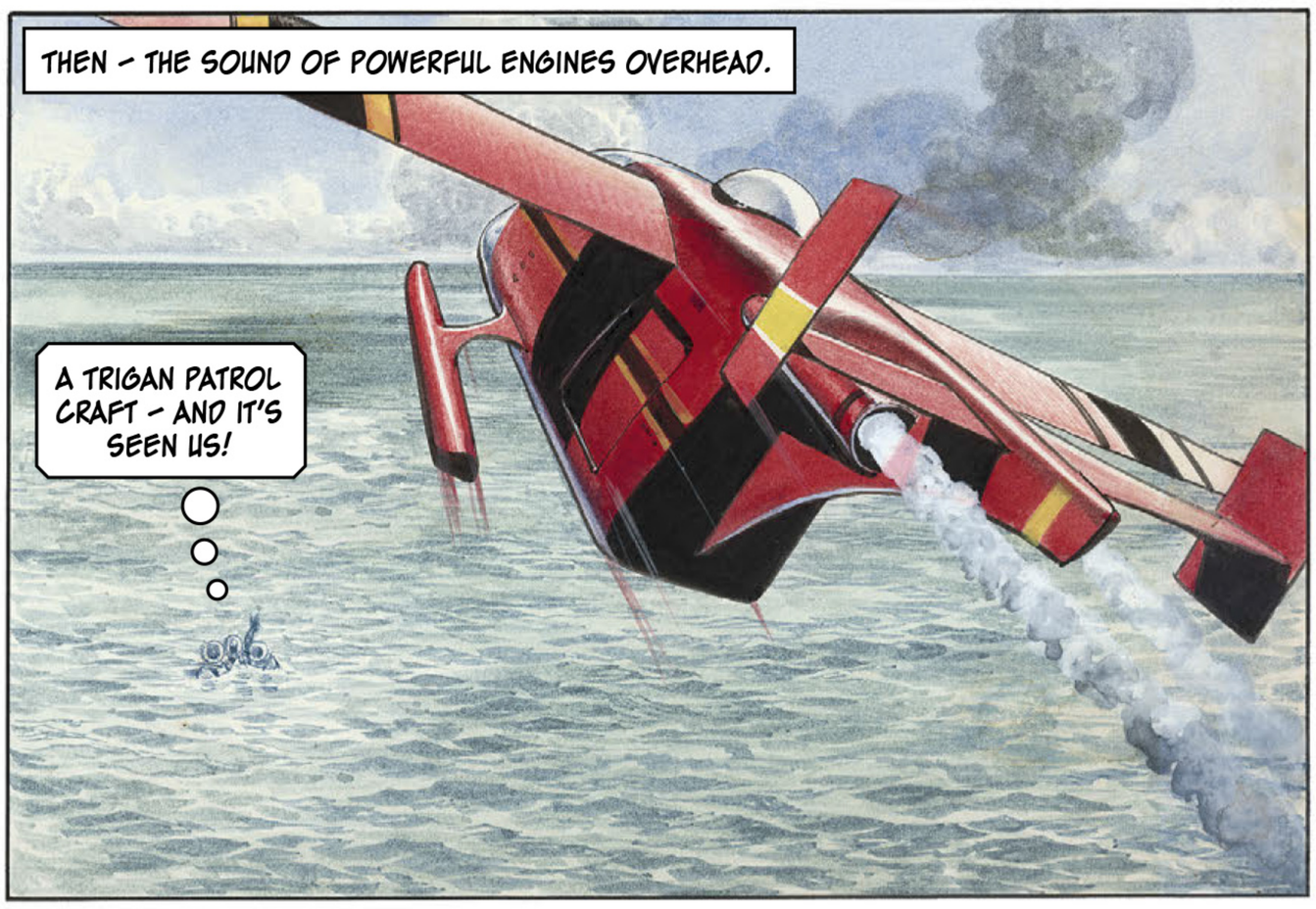

WITH A WRENCH AT THE CONTROLS, JANNO BROUGHT THE DEADLY HEAD OF THE DESTROYING UNIT DOWN UPON ITS PARENT MACHINE.

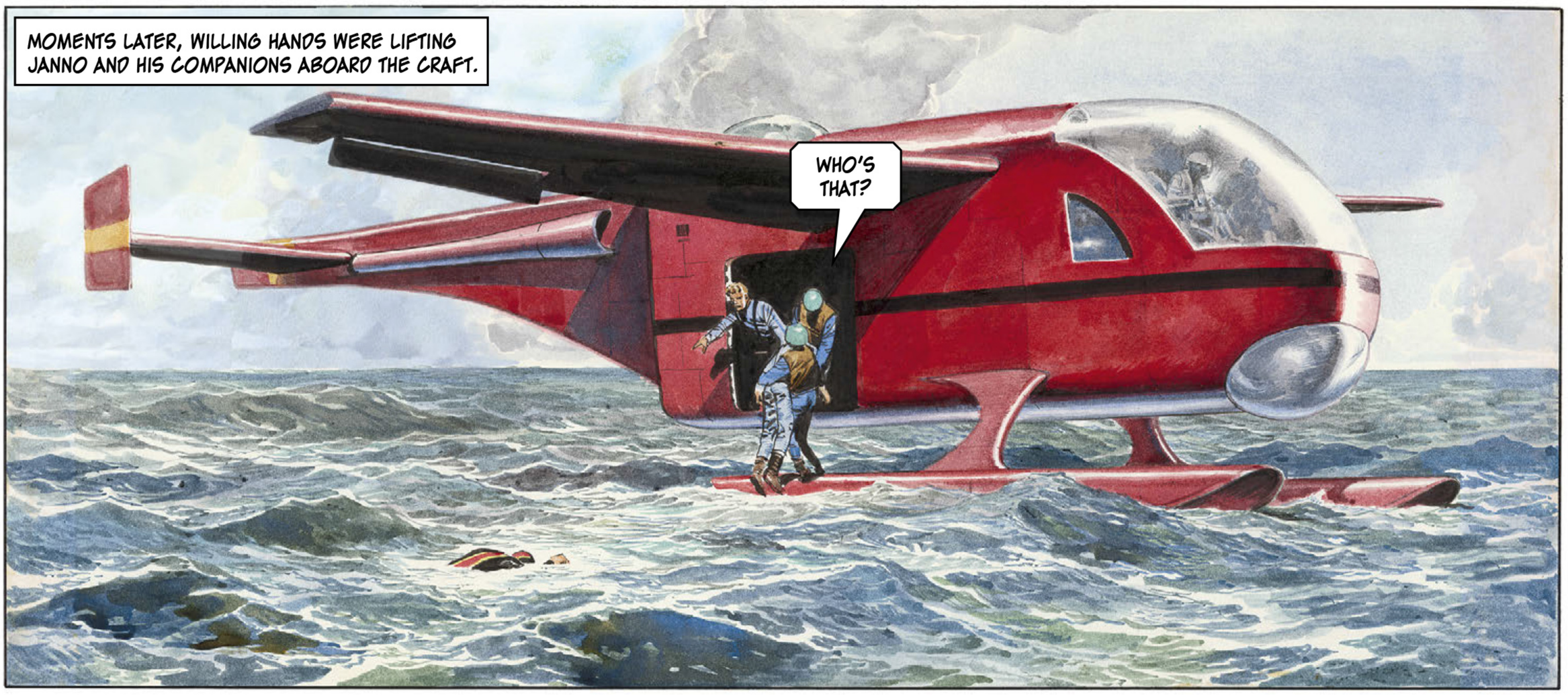
THE WORK OF DESTRUCTION WAS SWIFT – AND FINAL!


ALL LIGHTS FAILED INSIDE THE GREAT DOME AND LURID EXPLOSIONS RENT IT ASUNDER. WITH SHOCK WAVES POUNDING AT HIS HEAD, JANNO FELT HIMSELF RISING THROUGH THE RIVEN ROOF.


HIS HEAD BROKE SURFACE. LOOKING ABOUT HIM, HE SAW TWO FLOATING FIGURES IN FAMILIAR GARB.
KEREN AND ROFFA!

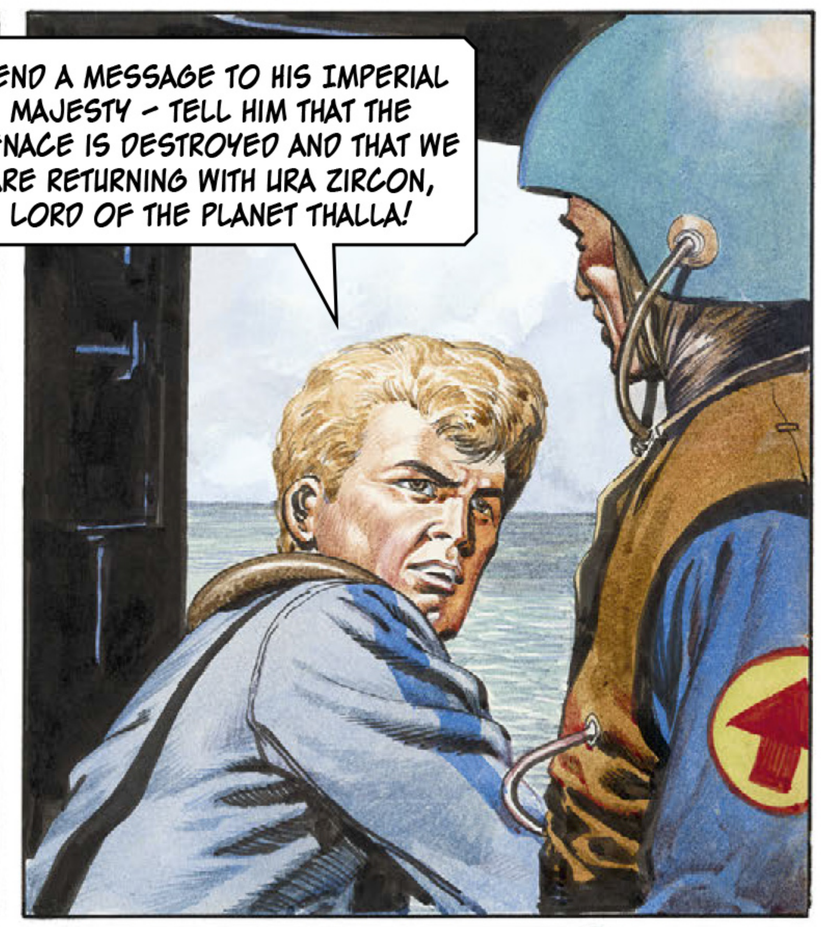
HE SEIZED HIS COMRADES.
THEY ARE STILL ALIVE!

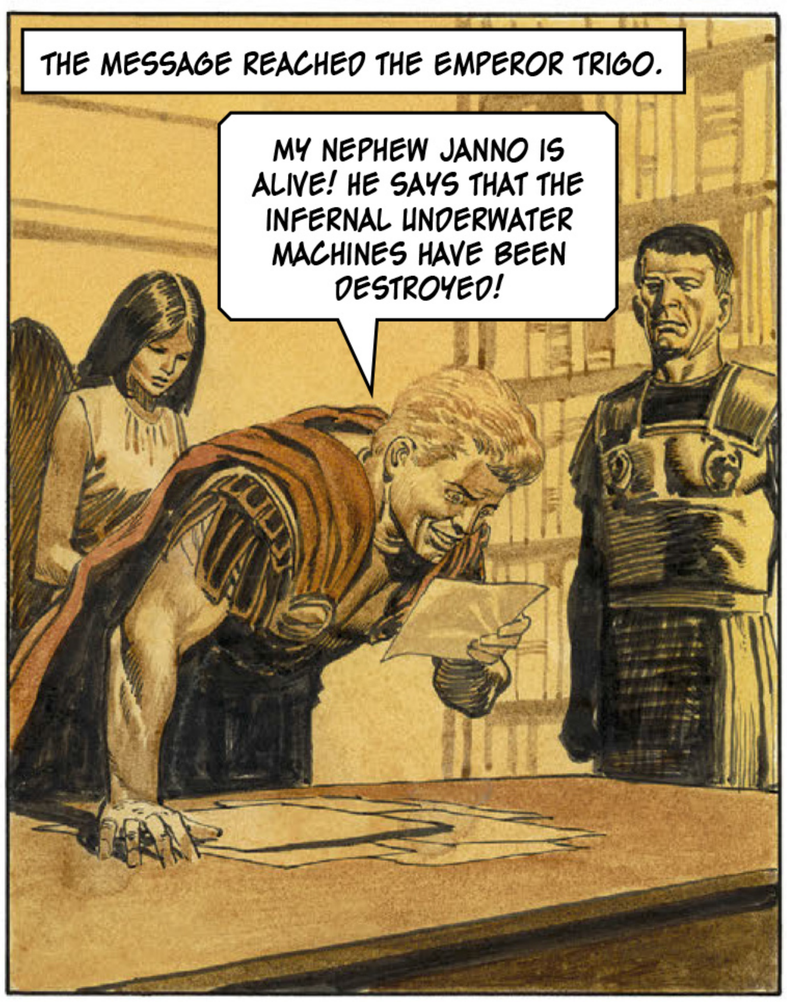

THEN – THE SOUND OF POWERFUL ENGINES OVERHEAD.
A TRIGAN PATROL CRAFT – AND IT'S SEEN US!


MOMENTS LATER, WILLING HANDS WERE LIFTING JANNO AND HIS COMPANIONS ABOARD THE CRAFT.
WHO'S THAT?

IT WAS ONE OF THE THALLANS.
WHO IS HE, THEN?
ONE OF OUR ENEMIES!

AND THEN – JANNO FOUND HIMSELF LOOKING INTO THE FACE OF...
URA ZIRCON!


SEND A MESSAGE TO HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY – TELL HIM THAT THE MENACE IS DESTROYED AND THAT WE ARE RETURNING WITH URA ZIRCON, LORD OF THE PLANET THALLA!


THE MESSAGE REACHED THE EMPEROR TRIGO.
MY NEPHEW JANNO IS ALIVE! HE SAYS THAT THE INFERNAL UNDERWATER MACHINES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED!

ALONE WITH HIS SECRETARY, THE EMPEROR PONDERED.
HE SAYS HE IS RETURNING WITH URA ZIRCON, LORD OF THE PLANET THALLA... WHO MIGHT HE BE?
THAT YOU WILL NOT LIVE TO DISCOVER, PROUD EMPEROR!

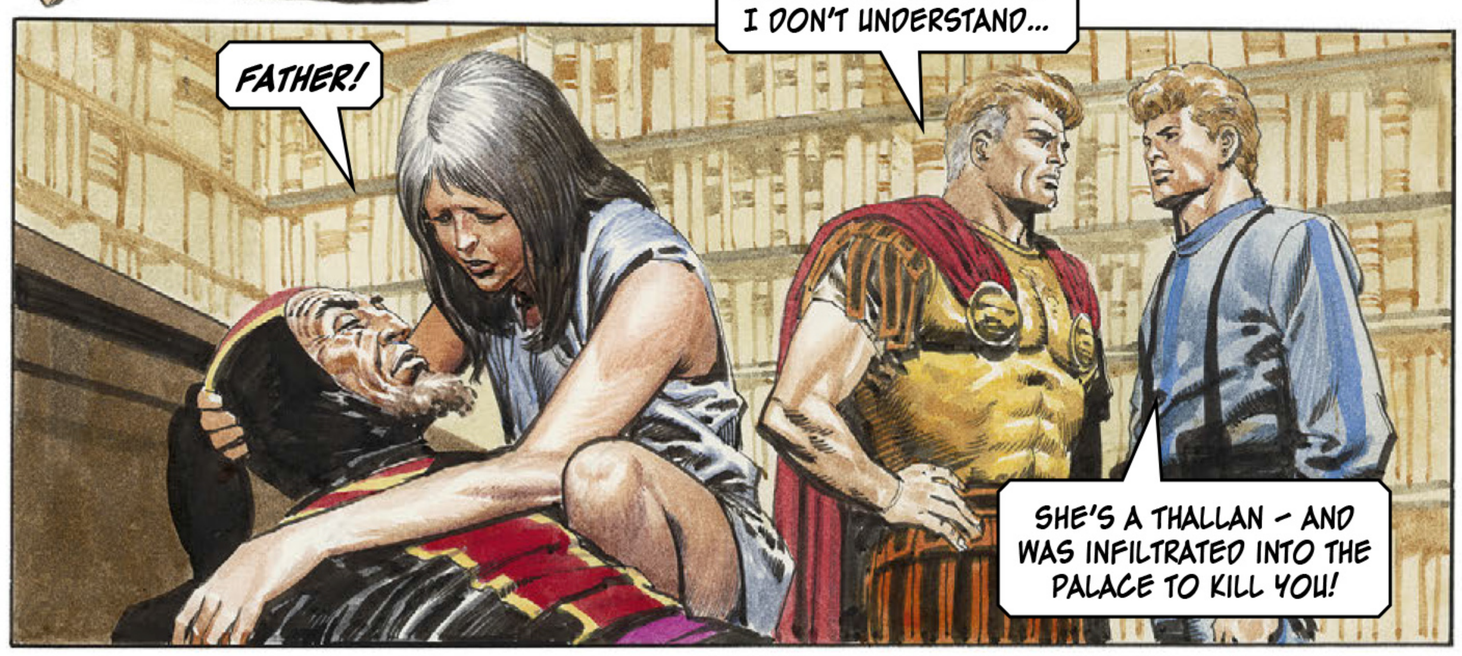
URA ZIRCON'S DAUGHTER EXTENDED HER HANDS...
YOU WILL RECEIVE THE FULL FORCE OF MY DESTRUCTIVE POWER – THE KILLING FORCE!

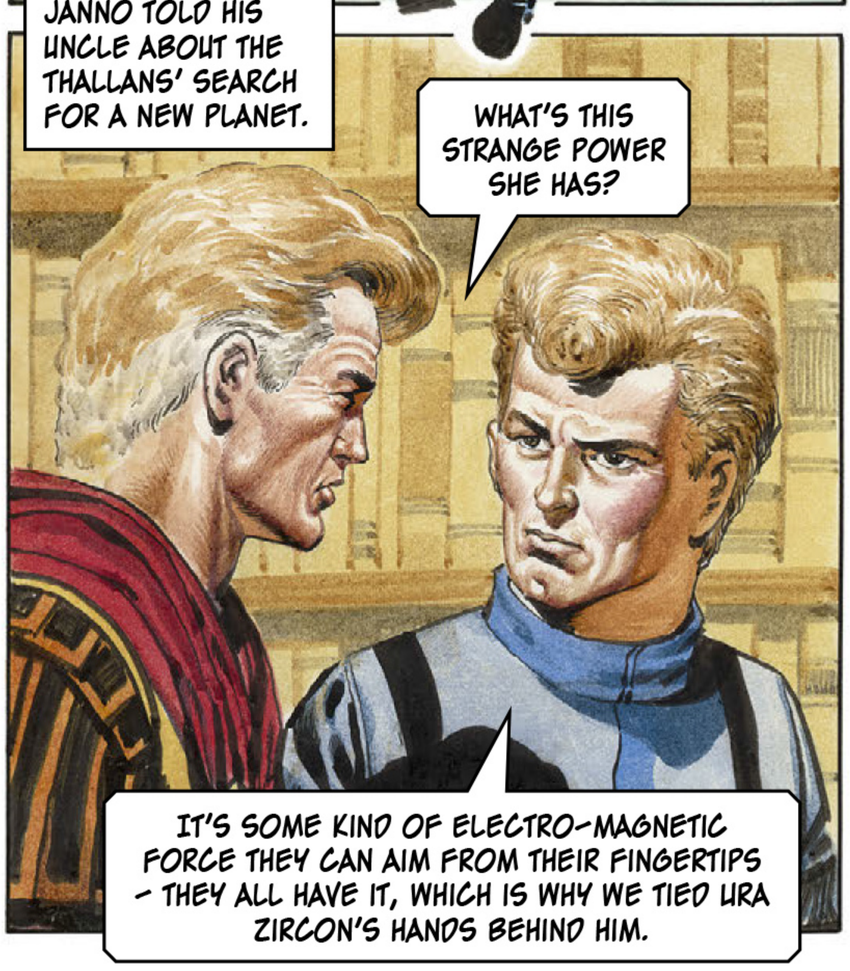
AS SORRA RAISED HER HANDS TO STRIKE – JANNO ENTERED!
UNCLE! WE'VE RETURNED – AND ALL'S WELL!
NEPHEW!

SORRA SWITCHED HER AIM TO JANNO.
YOU SHALL BE THE FIRST TO PERISH!

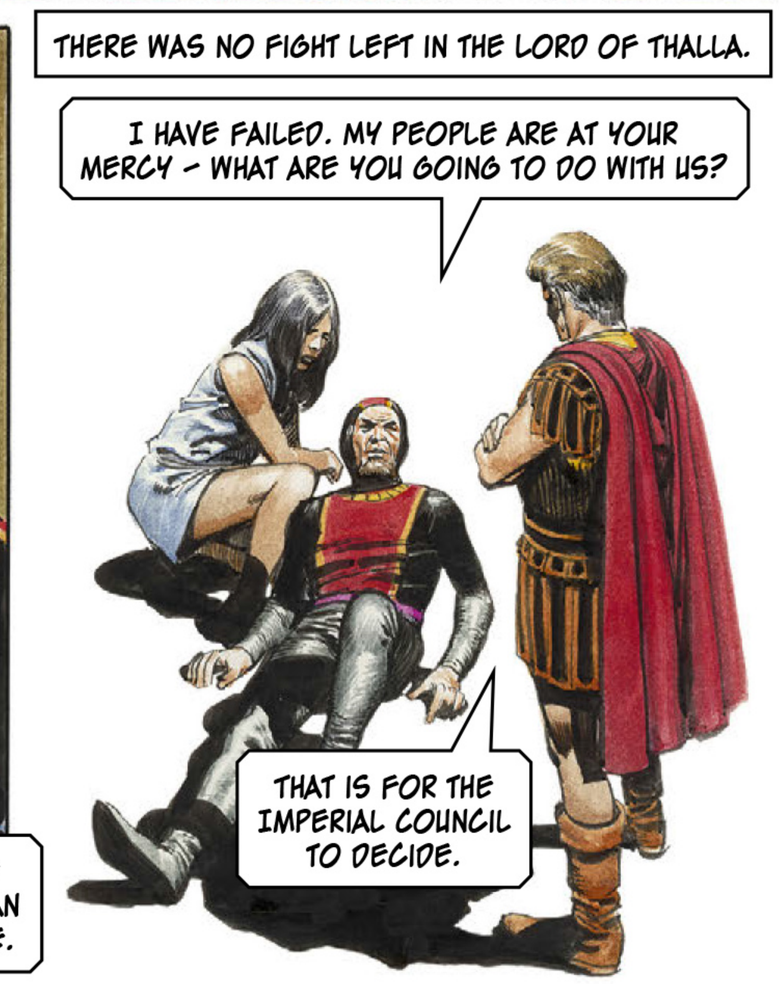
THE THREE TRIGANS THREW THEMSELVES ASIDE AS THE SEARING GREEN FLAME TORE PAST!

IT STRUCK THE PRISONER – URA ZIRCON, LORD OF THE PLANET THALLA!
UUUUUH...


FATHER!
FATHER AND DAUGHTER? I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
SHE'S A THALLAN – AND WAS INFILTRATED INTO THE PALACE TO KILL YOU!


JANNO TOLD HIS UNCLE ABOUT THE THALLANS' SEARCH FOR A NEW PLANET.
WHAT'S THIS STRANGE POWER SHE HAS?
IT'S SOME KIND OF ELECTRO-MAGNETIC FORCE THEY CAN AIM FROM THEIR FINGERTIPS – THEY ALL HAVE IT, WHICH IS WHY WE TIED URA ZIRCON'S HANDS BEHIND HIM.

AND THEN – URA ZIRCON OPENED HIS EYES.
OH, FATHER...
IT IS FORTUNATE THAT THE FORCE WHICH WOULD HAVE KILLED A TRIGAN WAS ONLY SUFFICIENT TO STUN ME.


THERE WAS NO FIGHT LEFT IN THE LORD OF THALLA.
I HAVE FAILED. MY PEOPLE ARE AT YOUR MERCY – WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH US?
THAT IS FOR THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL TO DECIDE.

THAT SAME DAY, THE COUNCIL OF THE EMPIRE MET TO DECIDE THE FATE OF THE THALLANS. TRIGO LISTENED TO THEIR VIEWS.

THESE MONSTERS SHOULD BE DESTROYED!

NO – SEND THEM BACK WHERE THEY CAME FROM!

KILL THEM, I SAY!

AND THEN...

I SAY *NO!* THERE WILL BE NO MORE KILLING. THE TRIGAN EMPIRE HAS ABSORBED MANY PEOPLES WITHIN ITS BOUNDARIES – WHY NOT THE THALLANS?

SO IT WAS THAT THE THALLAN SURVIVORS WERE BROUGHT BEFORE THE EMPEROR.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A VAST AREA ON THE BED OF THE GREAT OCEAN. DEVELOP IT – BUILD YOUR CITIES – RAISE YOUR CROPS – AND LIVE IN PEACE!

THANK YOU, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!

LATER, TRIGO SPOKE WITH URA ZIRCON...

TELL ME – WHY DID YOU CHOOSE ELEKTON FOR CONQUEST?

IT WAS THE MOST SUITABLE FOR OUR NEEDS. WE MADE MANY EXPLORATORY JOURNEYS TO OTHER PLANETS...

URA CONTINUED... "INCLUDING EARTH. NO DOUBT WE ALARMED THEM..."

I WONDER IF THE PEOPLE OF THAT PLANET COULD HAVE DEFEATED YOU AS WE DID!

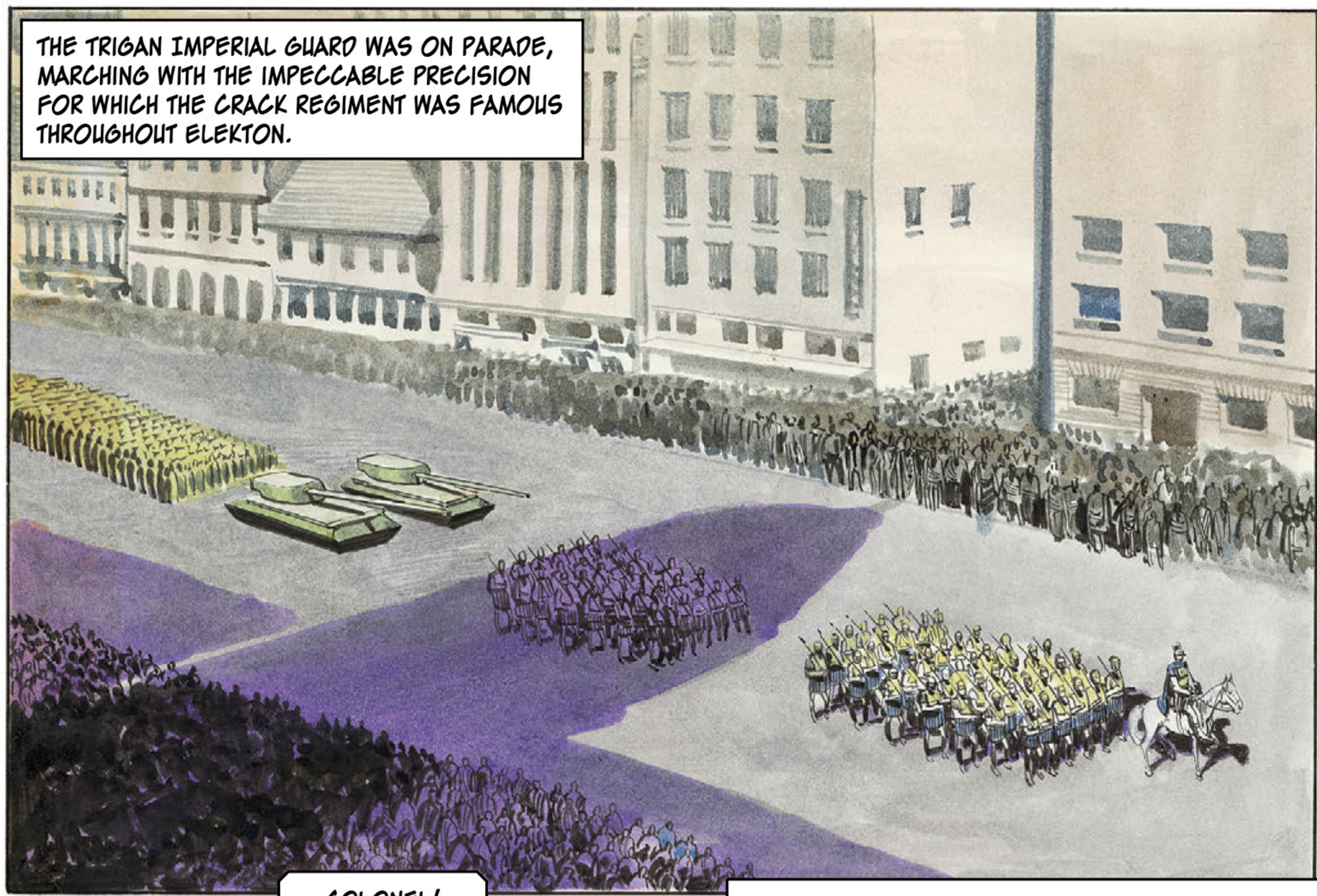
XXVI

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

THE RALLU INVASION

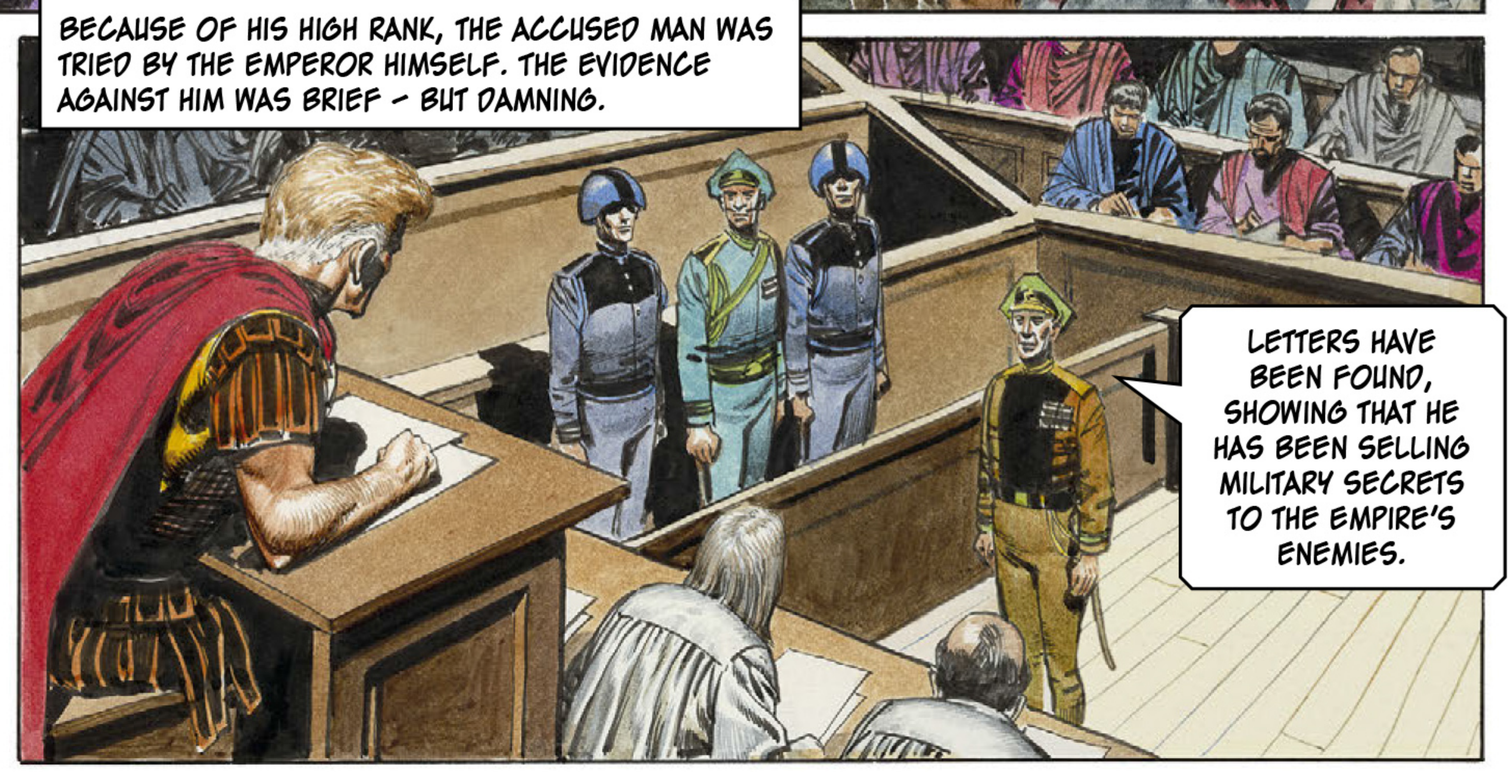
Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 475-480

13th February 1971 – 27th March 1971


THE TRIGAN IMPERIAL GUARD WAS ON PARADE, MARCHING WITH THE IMPECCABLE PRECISION FOR WHICH THE CRACK REGIMENT WAS FAMOUS THROUGHOUT ELEKTON.

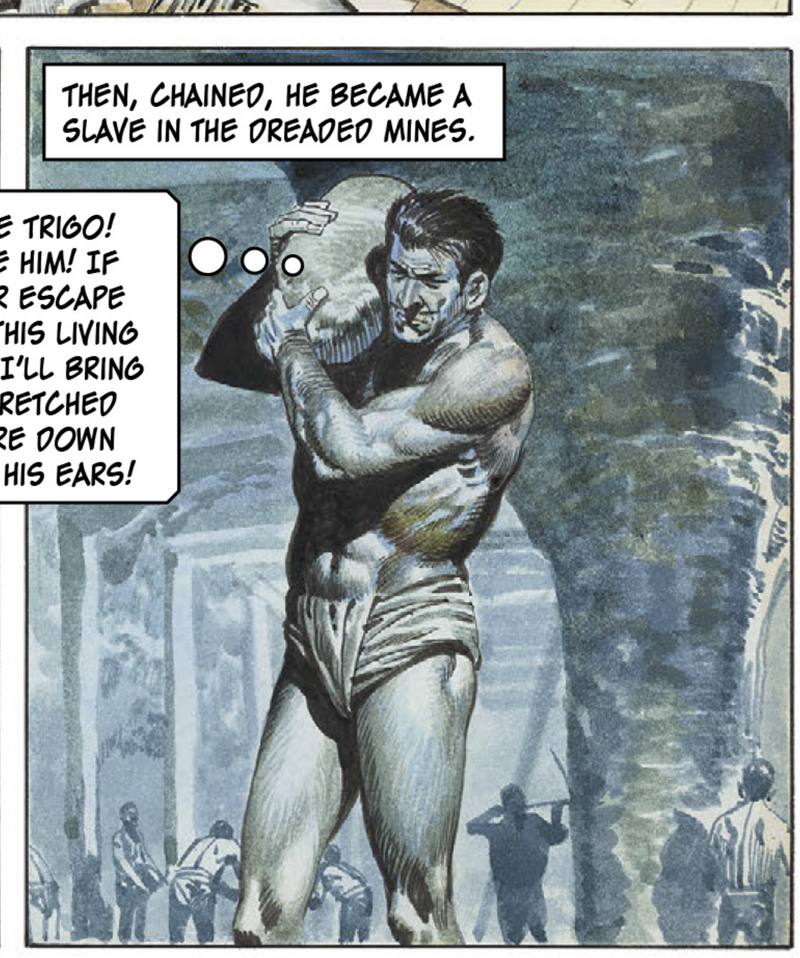
LEADING THE GUARDSMEN WAS THEIR COMMANDING OFFICER, TAX TORU – A HAUGHTY TRIGAN ARISTOCRAT.

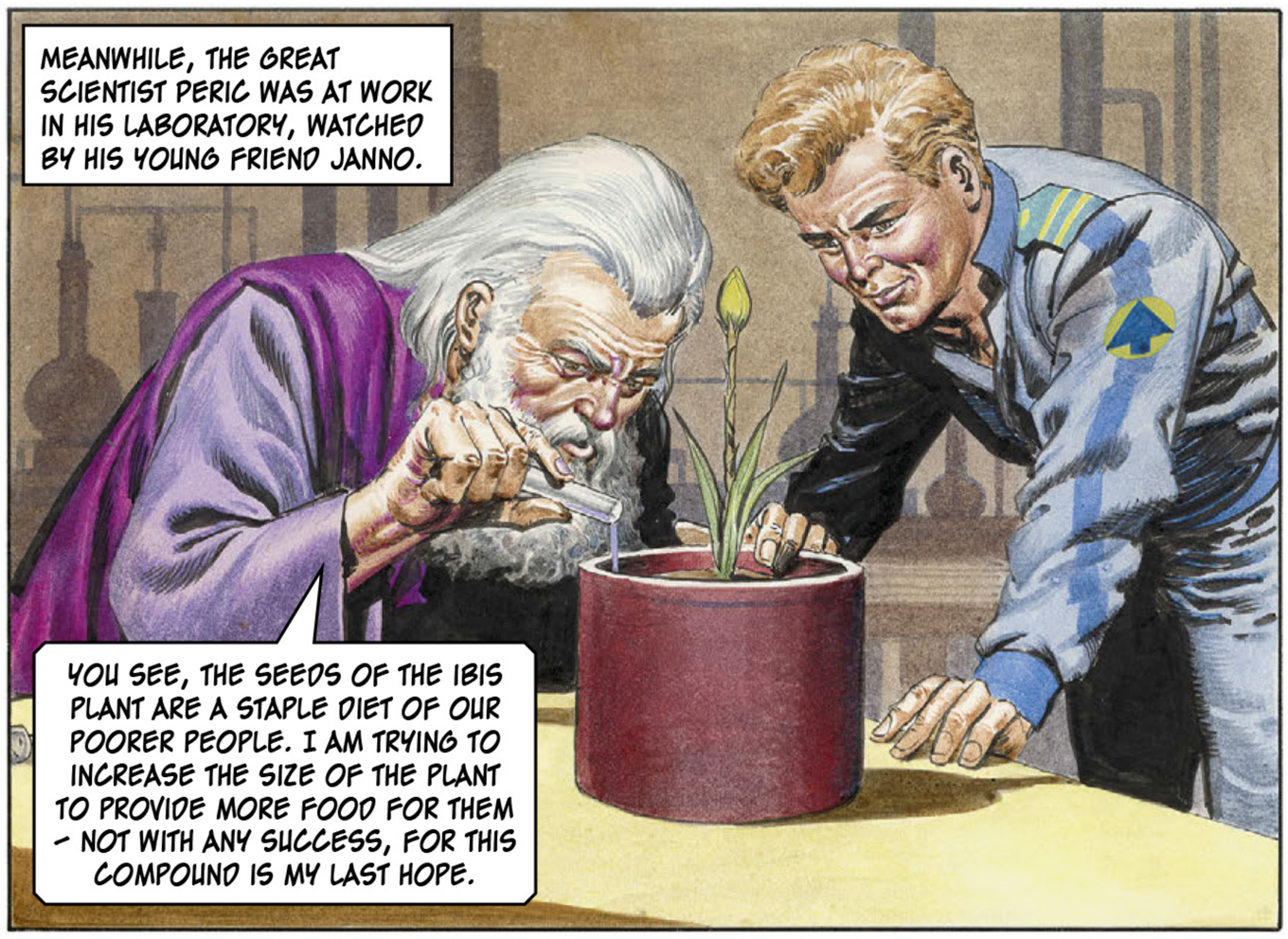
BUT AFTER THE PARADE...
COLONEL! YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!
AHH!?

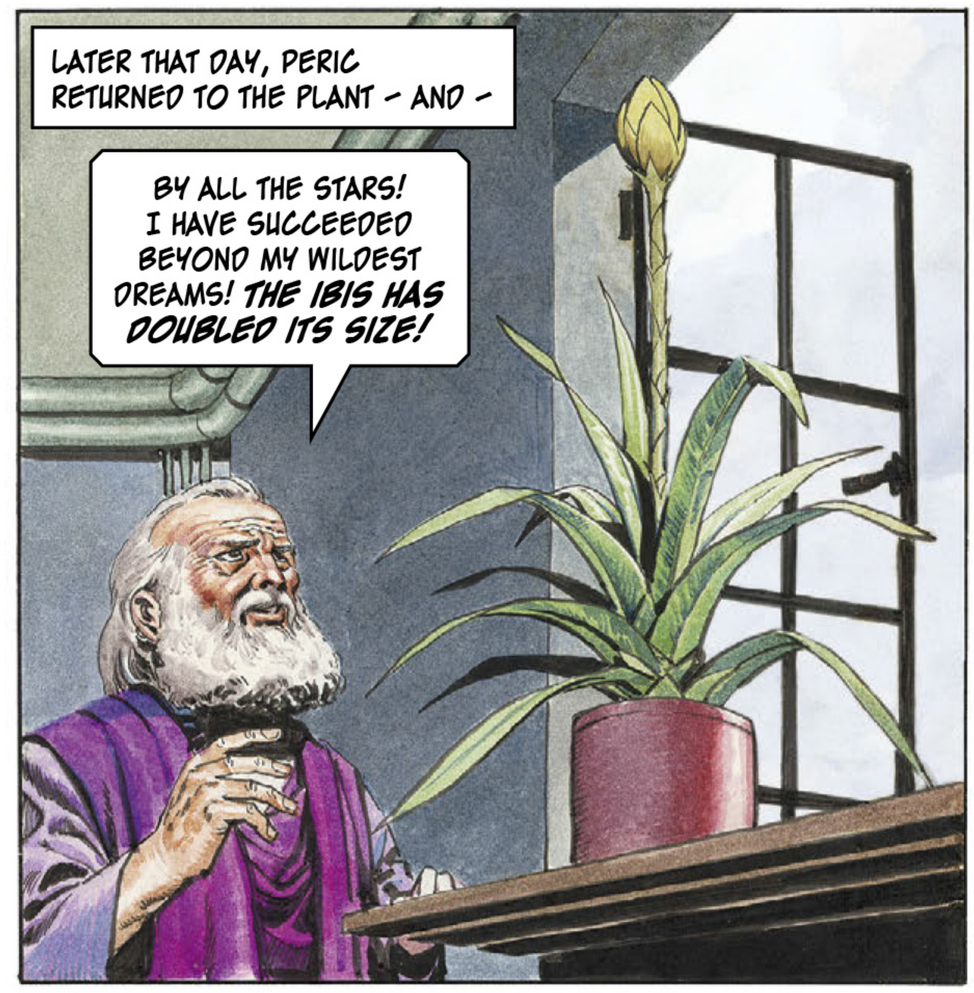

BECAUSE OF HIS HIGH RANK, THE ACCUSED MAN WAS TRIED BY THE EMPEROR HIMSELF. THE EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM WAS BRIEF – BUT DAMNING.
LETTERS HAVE BEEN FOUND, SHOWING THAT HE HAS BEEN SELLING MILITARY SECRETS TO THE EMPIRE'S ENEMIES.

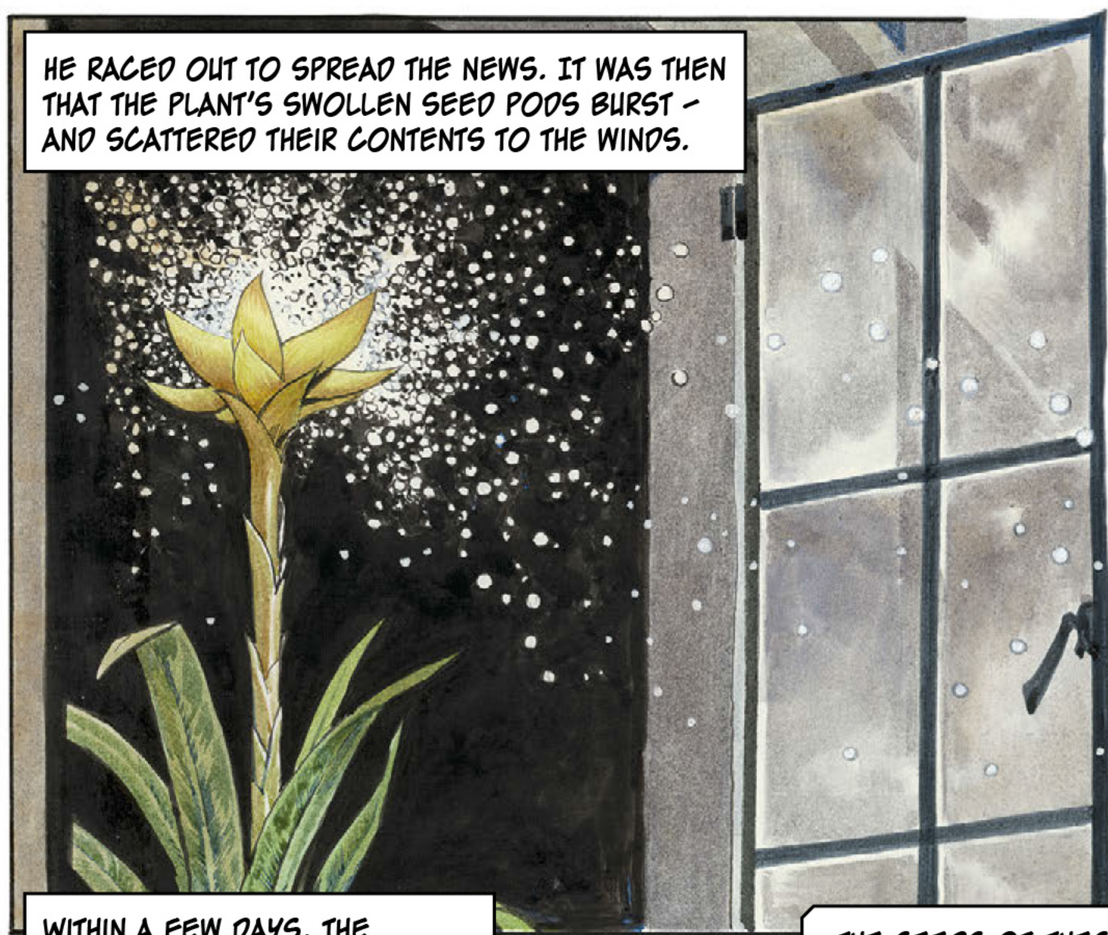
TRIGO PASSED SENTENCE.
TAX TORU! YOU HAVE BETRAYED THE EMPIRE AND SHAMED YOUR FAMILY NAME. YOU WILL BE STRIPPED OF YOUR RANK AND CONDEMNED TO LABOUR IN THE MINES FOR THE REST OF YOUR NATURAL LIFE.

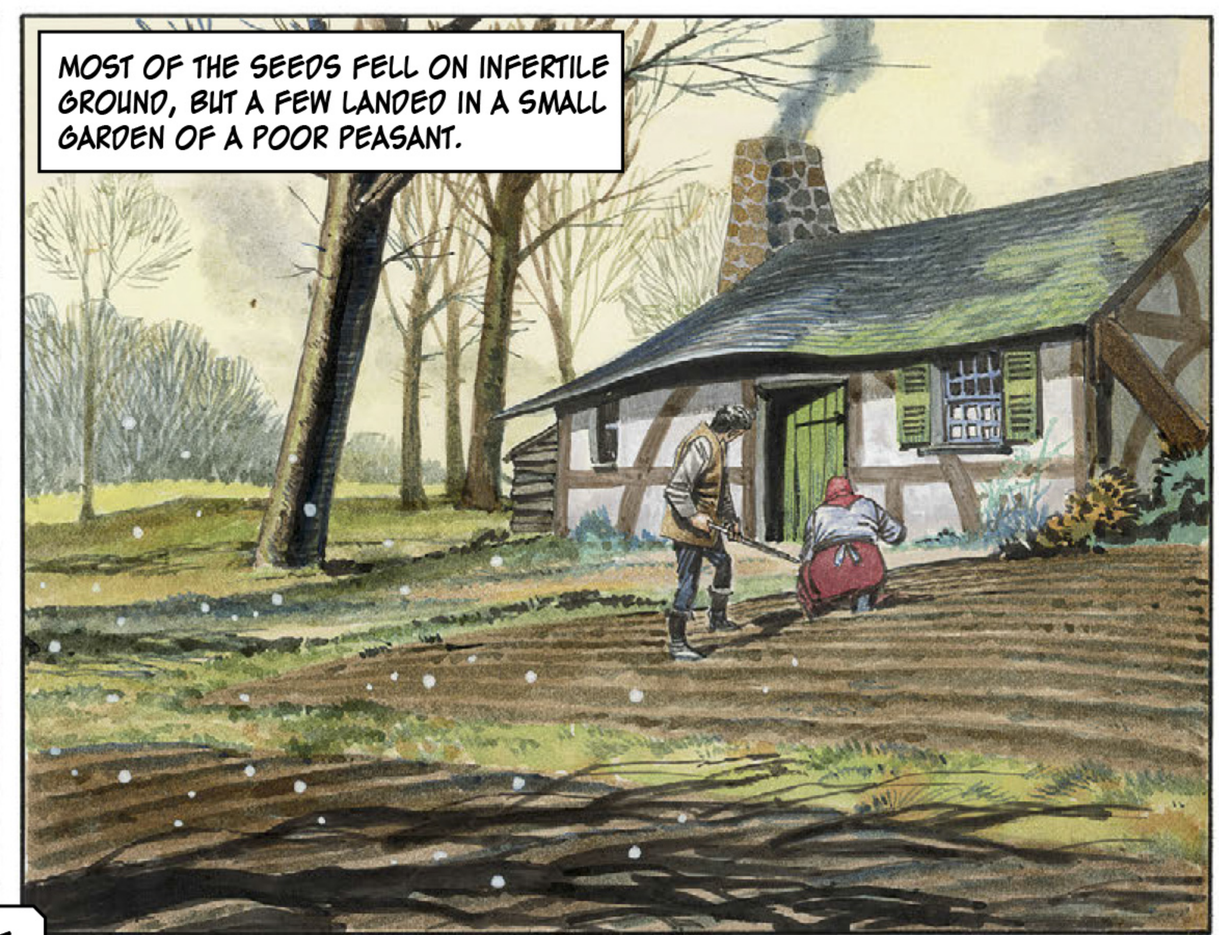
TAX TORU WAS PUBLICLY DISGRACED.
CURSE TRIGO! CURSE HIM! IF I EVER ESCAPE FROM THIS LIVING DEATH, I'LL BRING HIS WRETCHED EMPIRE DOWN ABOUT HIS EARS!

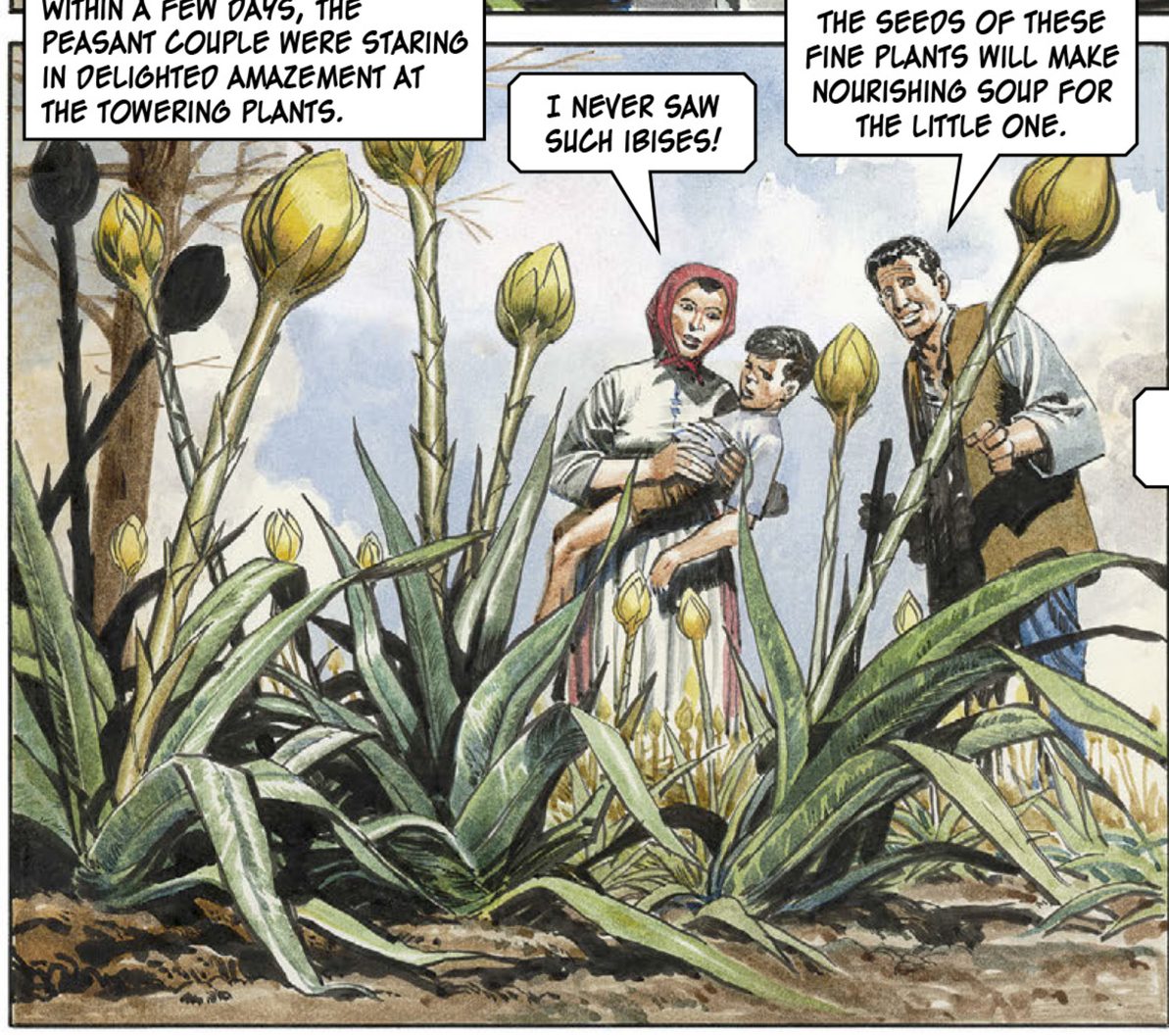

THEN, CHAINED, HE BECAME A SLAVE IN THE DREADED MINES.

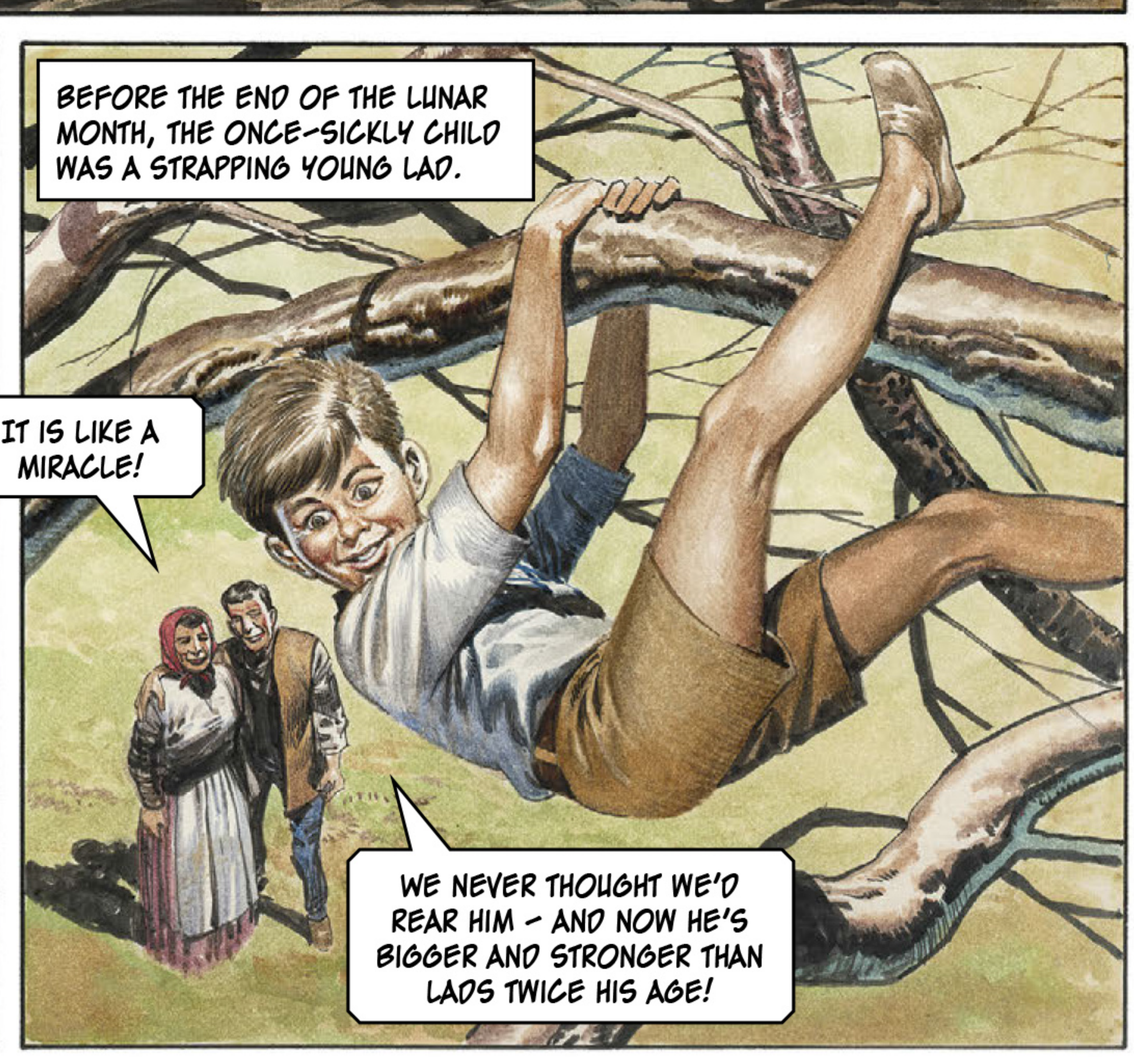

MEANWHILE, THE GREAT SCIENTIST PERIC WAS AT WORK IN HIS LABORATORY, WATCHED BY HIS YOUNG FRIEND JANNO.
YOU SEE, THE SEEDS OF THE IBIS PLANT ARE A STAPLE DIET OF OUR POORER PEOPLE. I AM TRYING TO INCREASE THE SIZE OF THE PLANT TO PROVIDE MORE FOOD FOR THEM – NOT WITH ANY SUCCESS, FOR THIS COMPOUND IS MY LAST HOPE.

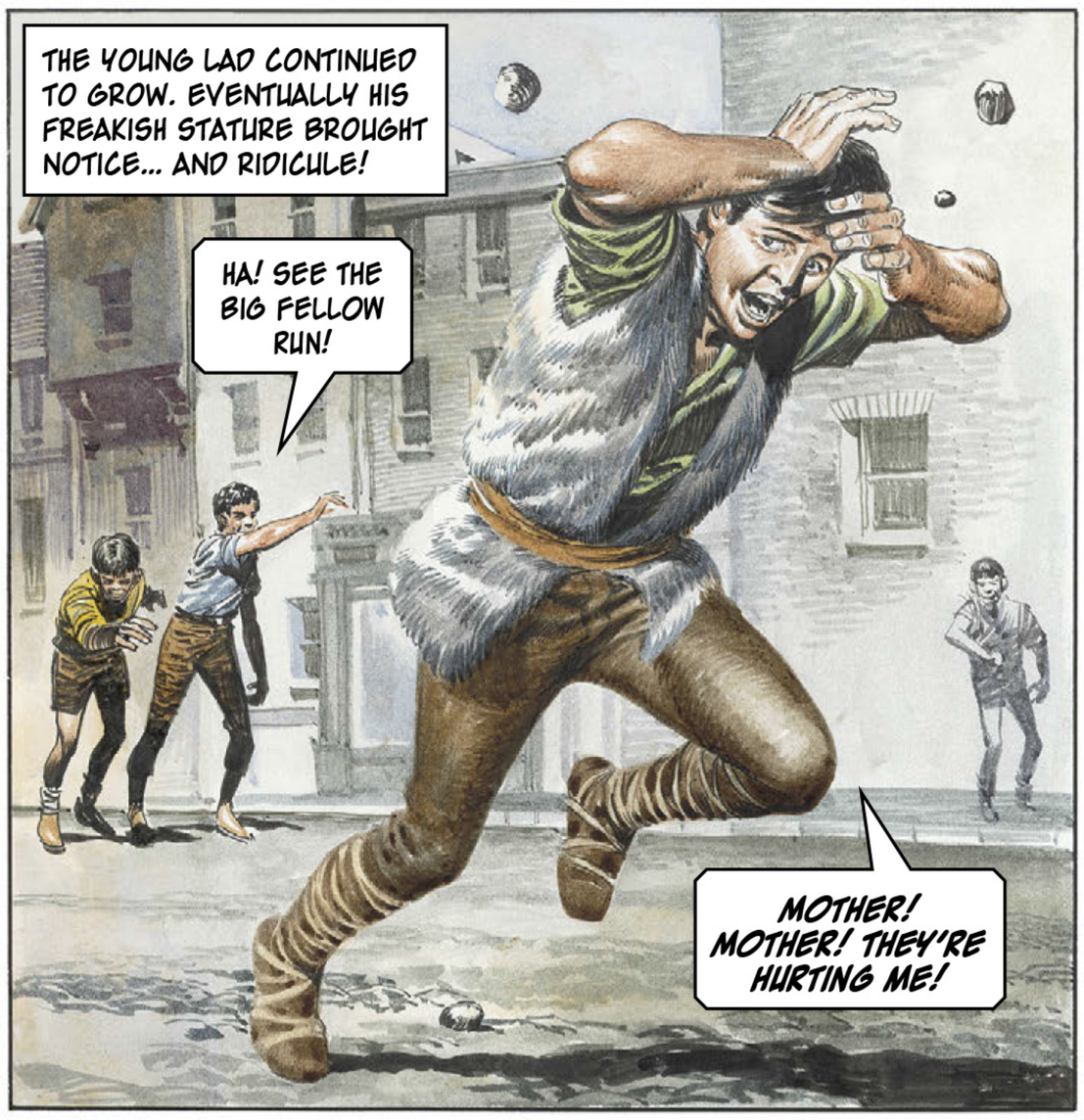

LATER THAT DAY, PERIC RETURNED TO THE PLANT – AND –
BY ALL THE STARS! I HAVE SUCCEEDED BEYOND MY WILDEST DREAMS! THE IBIS HAS DOUBLED ITS SIZE!


HE RACED OUT TO SPREAD THE NEWS. IT WAS THEN THAT THE PLANT'S SWOLLEN SEED PODS BURST – AND SCATTERED THEIR CONTENTS TO THE WINDS.


MOST OF THE SEEDS FELL ON INFERTILE GROUND, BUT A FEW LANDED IN A SMALL GARDEN OF A POOR PEASANT.

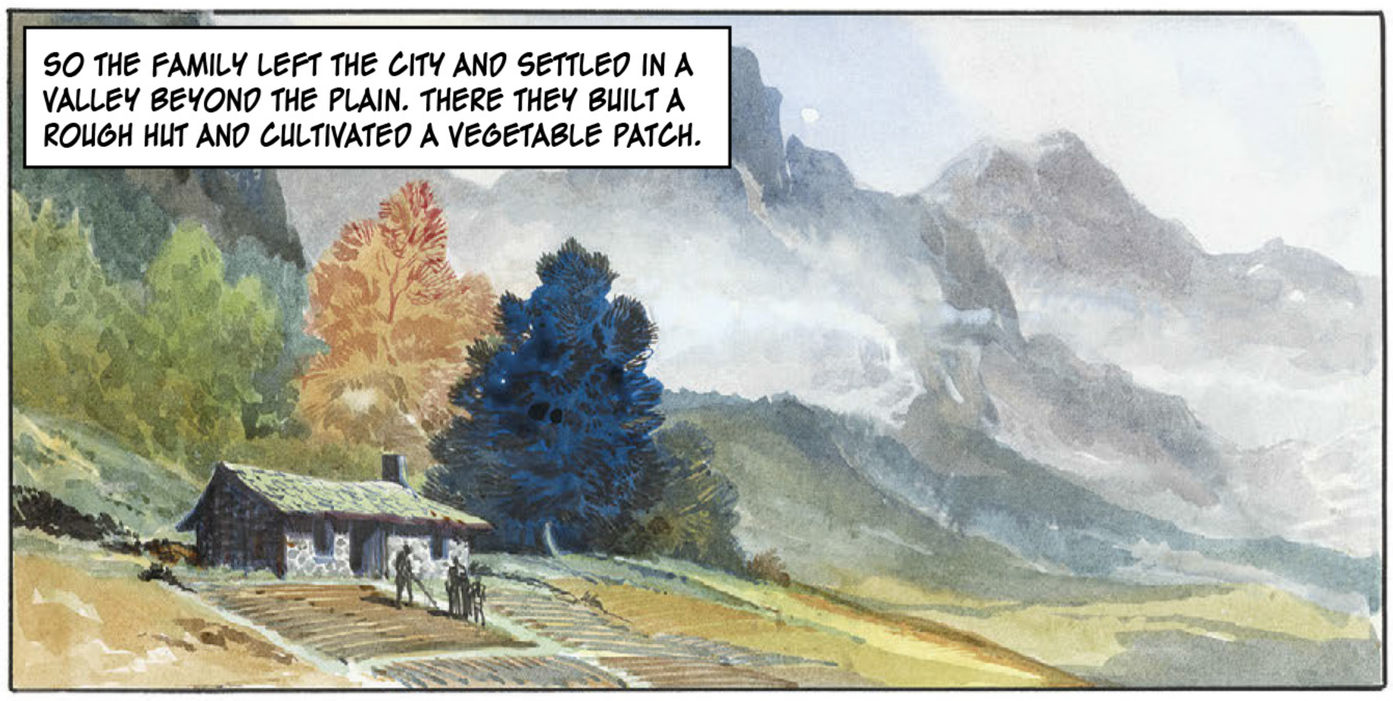

WITHIN A FEW DAYS, THE PEASANT COUPLE WERE STARING IN DELIGHTED AMAZEMENT AT THE TOWERING PLANTS.
I NEVER SAW SUCH IBISES!
THE SEEDS OF THESE FINE PLANTS WILL MAKE NOURISHING SOUP FOR THE LITTLE ONE.

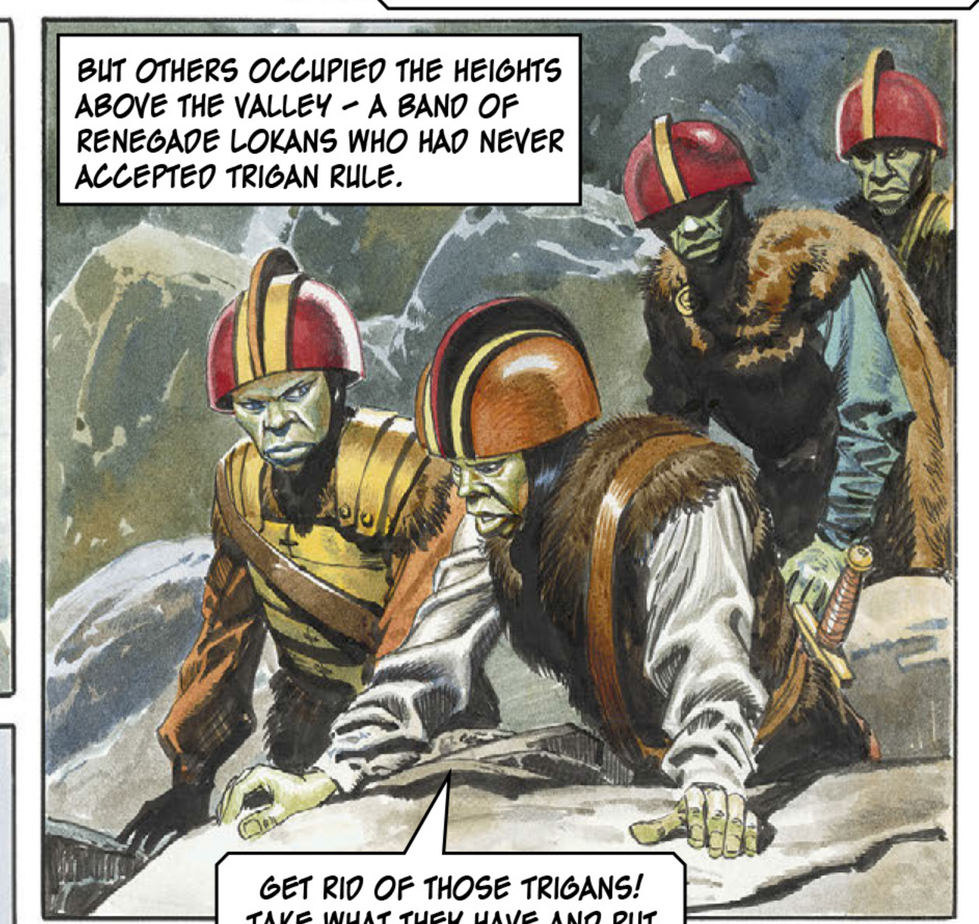

BEFORE THE END OF THE LUNAR MONTH, THE ONCE-SICKLY CHILD WAS A STRAPPING YOUNG LAD.
IT IS LIKE A MIRACLE!
WE NEVER THOUGHT WE'D REAR HIM – AND NOW HE'S BIGGER AND STRONGER THAN LADS TWICE HIS AGE!


THE YOUNG LAD CONTINUED TO GROW. EVENTUALLY HIS FREAKISH STATURE BROUGHT NOTICE... AND RIDICULE!
HA! SEE THE BIG FELLOW RUN!
MOTHER! MOTHER! THEY'RE HURTING ME!

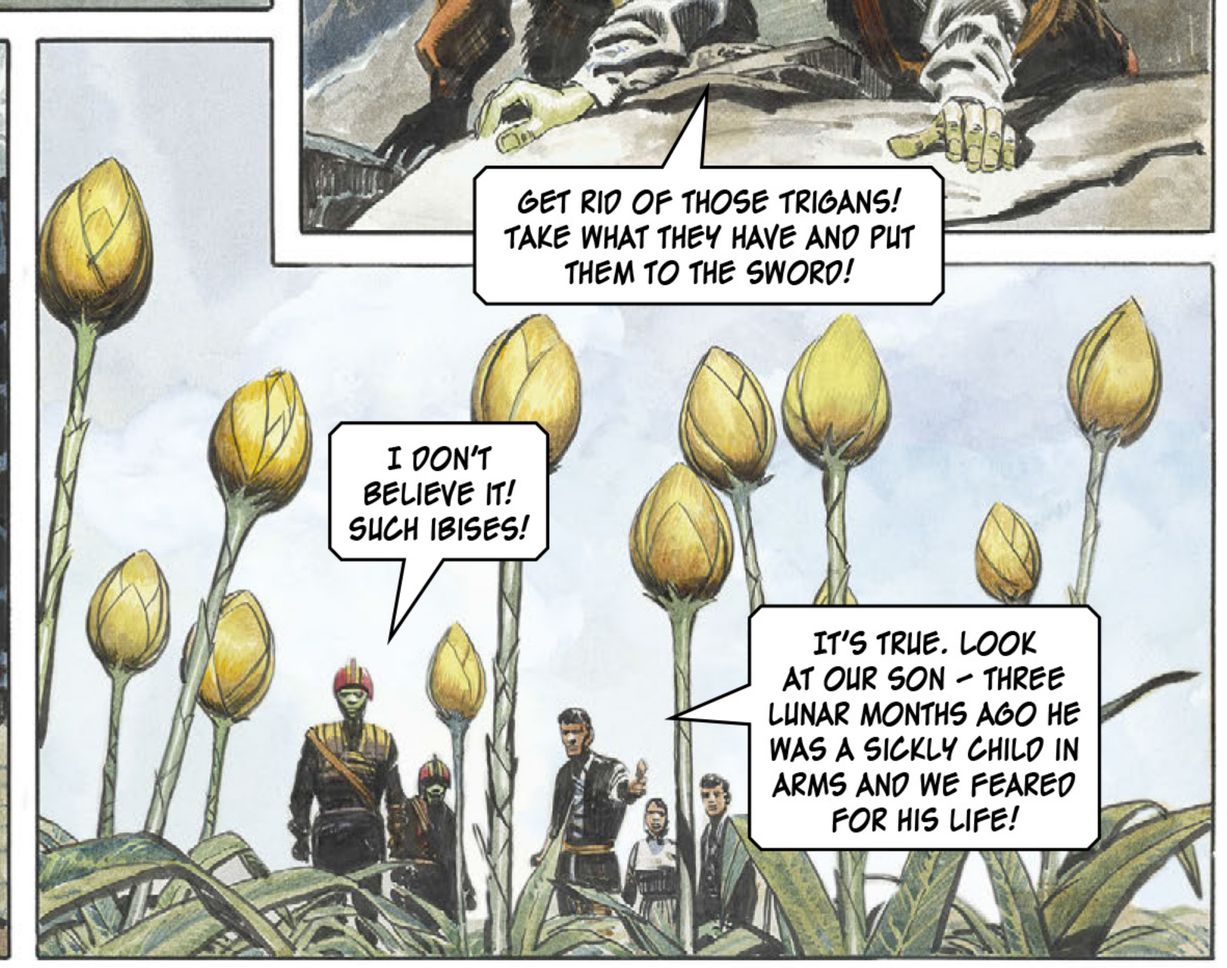
HE REACHED HOME, AND THE COMFORTING ARMS OF HIS MOTHER.
MY CHILD – HAVE THOSE ROUGH STREET BOYS BEEN ILL-TREATING YOU AGAIN?
YES – THEY WOULDN'T LET ME PLAY WITH THEM.

SOON HE WAS SLEEPING PEACEFULLY.
HE HAS THE BODY OF A GROWN MAN BUT HE IS STILL A CHILD IN HIS MIND.
YES, BUT HIS MIND GROWS EVERY DAY. HUSBAND – CAN WE NOT TAKE HIM AWAY TO SOME REMOTE SPOT WHERE HE MAY MATURE IN PEACE?


SO THE FAMILY LEFT THE CITY AND SETTLED IN A VALLEY BEYOND THE PLAIN. THERE THEY BUILT A ROUGH HUT AND CULTIVATED A VEGETABLE PATCH.

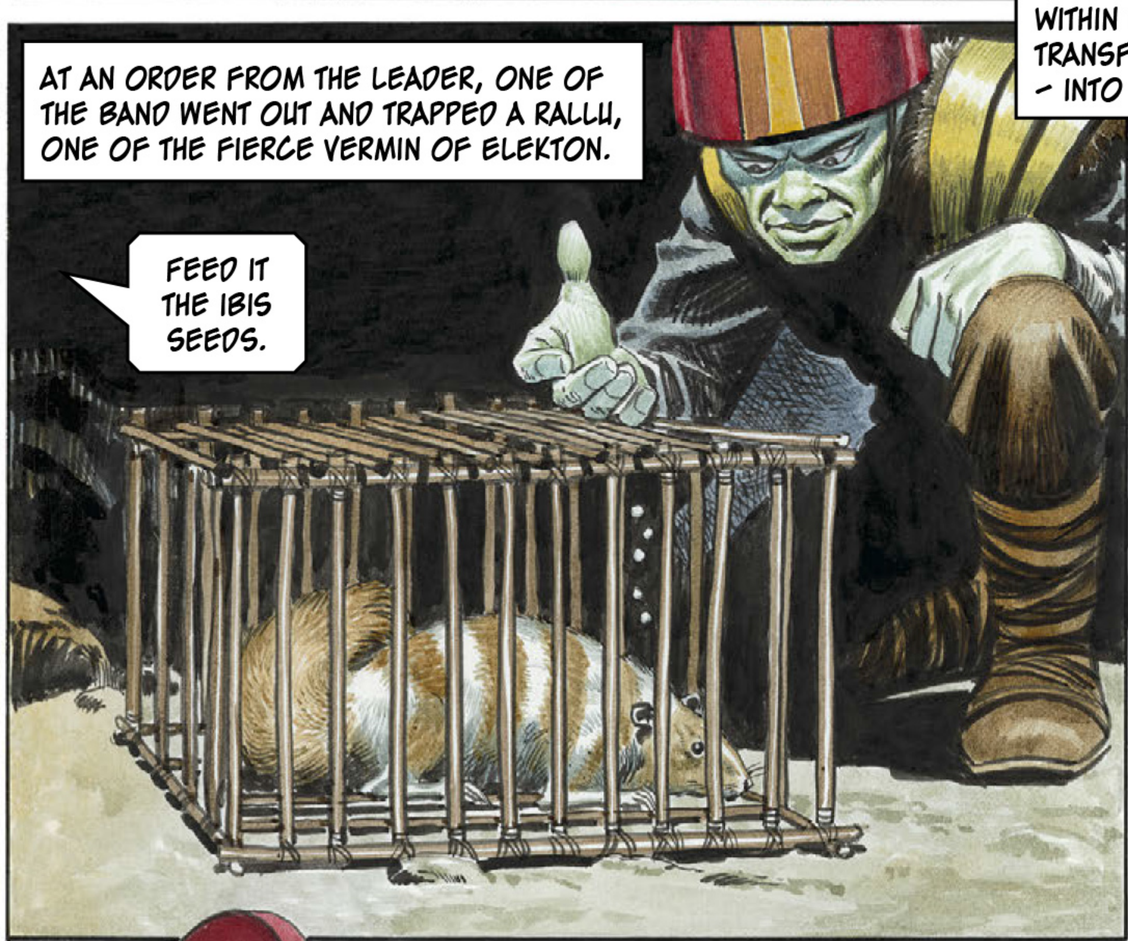

BUT OTHERS OCCUPIED THE HEIGHTS ABOVE THE VALLEY – A BAND OF RENEGADE LOKANS WHO HAD NEVER ACCEPTED TRIGAN RULE.
GET RID OF THOSE TRIGANS! TAKE WHAT THEY HAVE AND PUT THEM TO THE SWORD!

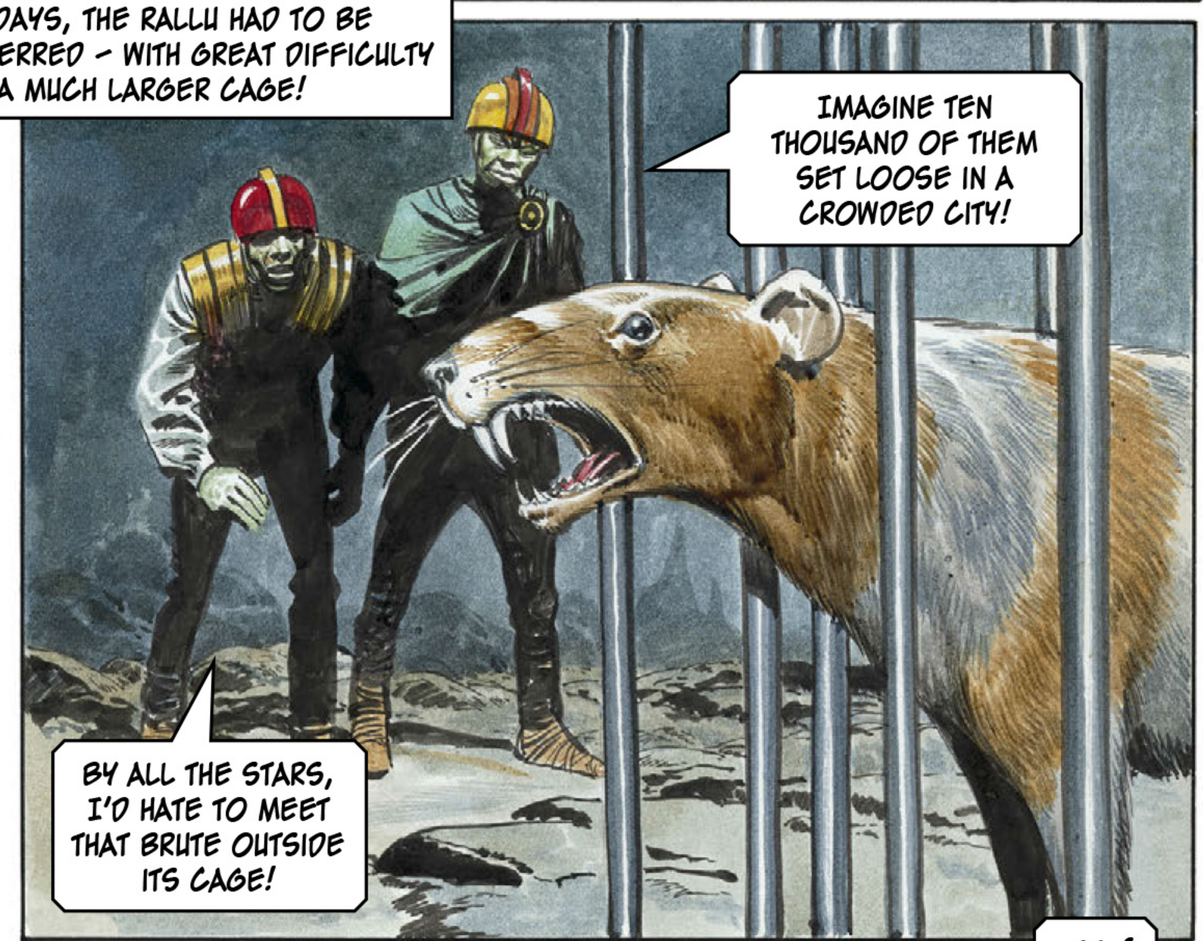
THE LOKANS ATTACKED.
MERCY! SPARE US... AND I WILL SHOW YOU A MIRACLE!
A MIRACLE?


I DON'T BELIEVE IT! SUCH IBISES!
IT'S TRUE. LOOK AT OUR SON – THREE LUNAR MONTHS AGO HE WAS A SICKLY CHILD IN ARMS AND WE FEARED FOR HIS LIFE!

THE PUZZLED LOKANS PONDERED.
MOTHER – MAY I HAVE A DRINK OF WATER?
ANOTHER STRANGE THING – HE DRINKS WATER ALL THE TIME. HE COULD DRAIN A RIVER DRY.

INSTEAD OF SLAYING THE FAMILY, THEY BROUGHT THEM BEFORE THEIR LEADER.
IT CAN EASILY BE TESTED.
IT IS A FANTASTIC TALE – BUT IT MAY BE TRUE.


AT AN ORDER FROM THE LEADER, ONE OF THE BAND WENT OUT AND TRAPPED A RALLU, ONE OF THE FIERCE VERMIN OF ELEKTON.
FEED IT THE IBIS SEEDS.

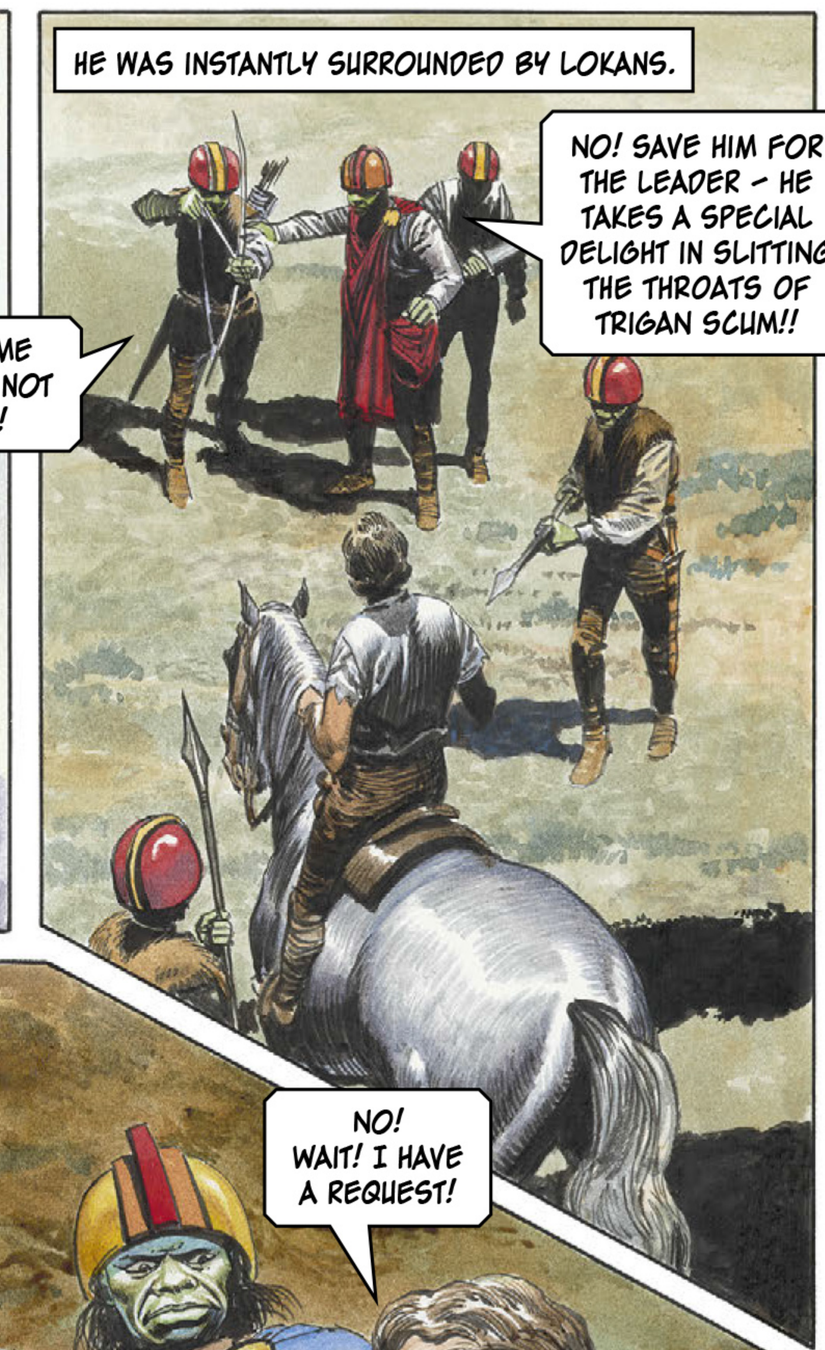

WITHIN DAYS, THE RALLU HAD TO BE TRANSFERRED – WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY – INTO A MUCH LARGER CAGE!
IMAGINE TEN THOUSAND OF THEM SET LOOSE IN A CROWDED CITY!
BY ALL THE STARS, I'D HATE TO MEET THAT BRUTE OUTSIDE ITS CAGE!

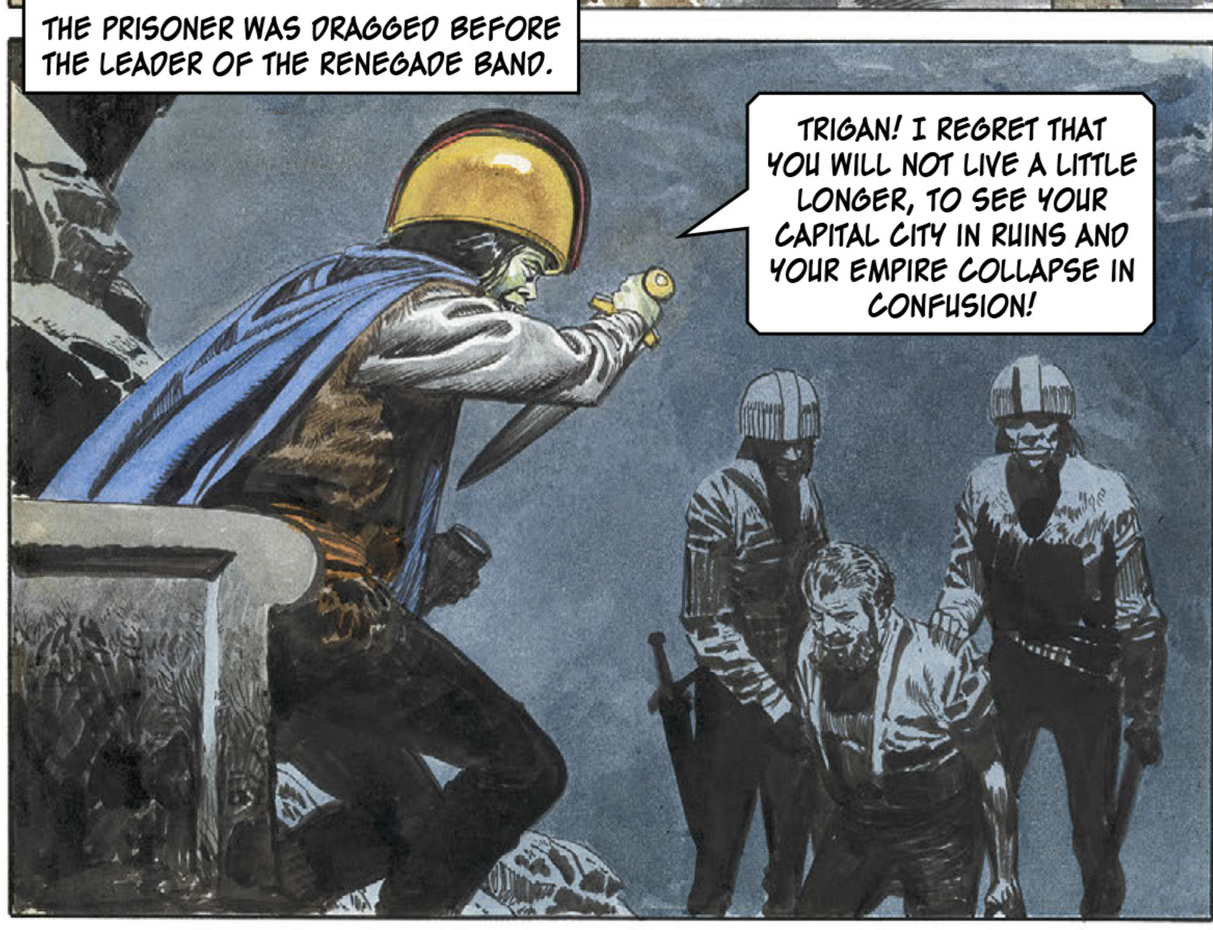
BROTHERS! HERE IS A WEAPON WITH WHICH WE CAN DESTROY TRIGAN CITY, AND PERHAPS BRING THAT CURSED EMPIRE TO ITS KNEES!

MEANWHILE, IN THE DREADED CONVICT MINES, THE HATE-FILLED TAX TORU HAD REACHED THE END OF HIS ENDURANCE.
ESCAPE! ESCAPE! AND THEN – DEATH TO TRIGO'S EMPIRE!

THE NOBLEMAN WHOM TRIGO HAD DEBASED FOR TREASON WAS READY TO TAKE HIS REVENGE!
HA!
UUUUUUHHH...

A DISHEVELLED FIGURE ON A STOLEN KREED WAS RIDING THROUGH A LONELY VALLEY. SUDDENLY – THE HISS OF AN ARROW!
AAAGH!


HE WAS INSTANTLY SURROUNDED BY LOKANS.
THIS TIME I SHALL NOT MISS!
NO! SAVE HIM FOR THE LEADER – HE TAKES A SPECIAL DELIGHT IN SLITTING THE THROATS OF TRIGAN SCUM!!


THE PRISONER WAS DRAGGED BEFORE THE LEADER OF THE RENEGADE BAND.
TRIGAN! I REGRET THAT YOU WILL NOT LIVE A LITTLE LONGER, TO SEE YOUR CAPITAL CITY IN RUINS AND YOUR EMPIRE COLLAPSE IN CONFUSION!

NO! WAIT! I HAVE A REQUEST!
WHAT'S THIS?

LET ME LIVE TO SEE THE ACCURSED EMPEROR TRIGO SLAIN BEFORE MY EYES! THEN I WILL DIE HAPPY!
WHO ARE YOU, TRIGAN? YOU LOOK LIKE A SLAVE, YET YOU SPEAK LIKE A WARRIOR!

I AM TAX TORU – FORMERLY COMMANDER OF THE TRIGAN IMPERIAL GUARD, UNTIL I WAS DISGRACED BY THE JUDGMENT OF TRIGO AND SENT TO SLAVE IN THE MINES. I ESCAPED THIS MORNING AND I ONLY LIVE FOR VENGEANCE!

YOU PLEASE ME, TAX TORU. A MAN DRIVEN ON BY HATRED IS A GOOD ALLY. YOUR WISH WILL BE GRANTED, AND YOU SHALL HELP US IN OUR PLAN – TONIGHT!

THAT NIGHT, DISGUISED AS DESERT TRADERS, TAX TORU AND TWO LOKANS ENTERED THE CITY GATES WITH A WAGON. LOOKING AND SPEAKING LIKE A TRIGAN SUBJECT, THE ESCAPED CONVICT AROUSED NO SUSPICIONS.

WE BRING A LOAD OF VEGETABLES FOR THE MARKET.

PASS THROUGH!

THEY CAME TO A DARK STREET.

RELEASE THE RALLUS!

A TUMBLING HOST OF SQUEALING RALLUS EMERGED FROM A CAGE WITHIN THE WAGON AND SCUTTLED INTO A DARK ENTRANCE.

TAX TORU WAS PUZZLED.

HOW CAN THEY DESTROY TRIGAN CITY? PARTS OF THE CITY ARE ALREADY INFESTED WITH THEM.

AH! BUT THOSE ARE ***SPECIAL*** RALLUS!

QUIET, FOOL! HE IS NOT TO BE TOLD THE SECRET!

TWO DAYS LATER, A MARKET WAS HELD IN THE GREAT SQUARE OF THE CITY. WHEN THE TWIN SUNS OF ELEKTON WERE HIGH IN THE SKY – ***IT HAPPENED!***

THERE WAS THE THUNDER OF COUNTLESS FLYING FEET. MARKET STALLS WERE OVERTURNED IN CONFUSION. AND A HOST OF ***GIANT RALLUS*** HURLED THEMSELVES AT THE PANIC-STRICKEN CROWD.

EEEEEEH! LOOK!

BY ALL THE STARS!

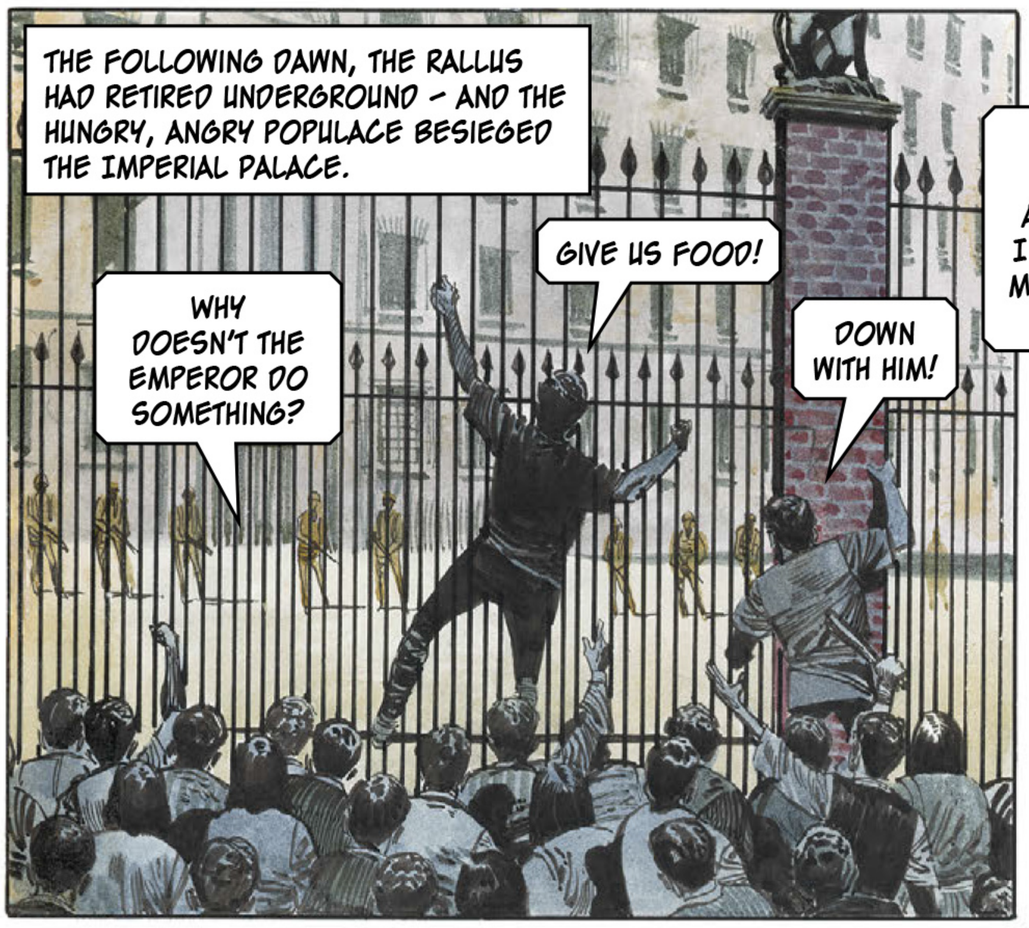
AAAAAAH!

THE TERRIFIED CROWD BROKE THROUGH THE RANKS OF A COHORT OF THE TRIGAN IMPERIAL GUARD AT THE FAR END OF THE SQUARE.
TAKE AIM!

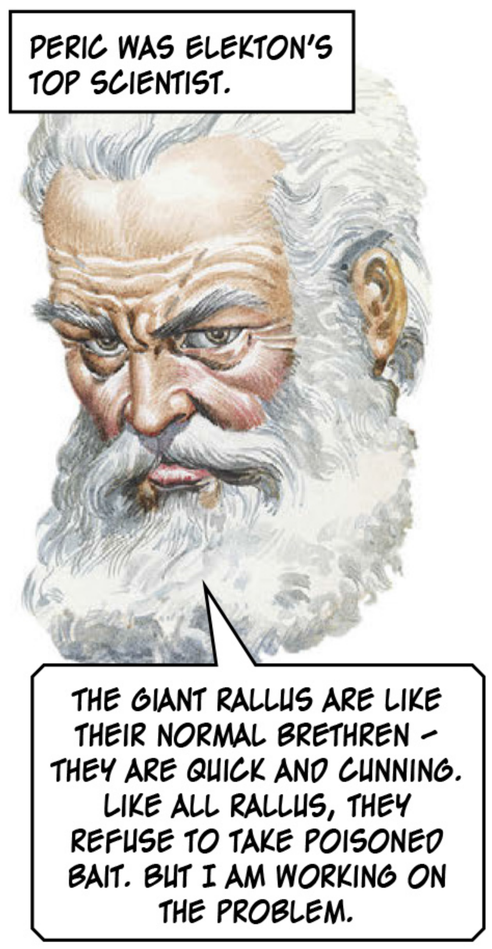
THEN THAT MAGNIFICENT BODY OF WARRIORS – WHO HAD WON A THOUSAND HOPELESS BATTLES IN THE EMPIRE'S SHORT HISTORY – TURNED AND FLED!
EEEEH!
AAAAGH!

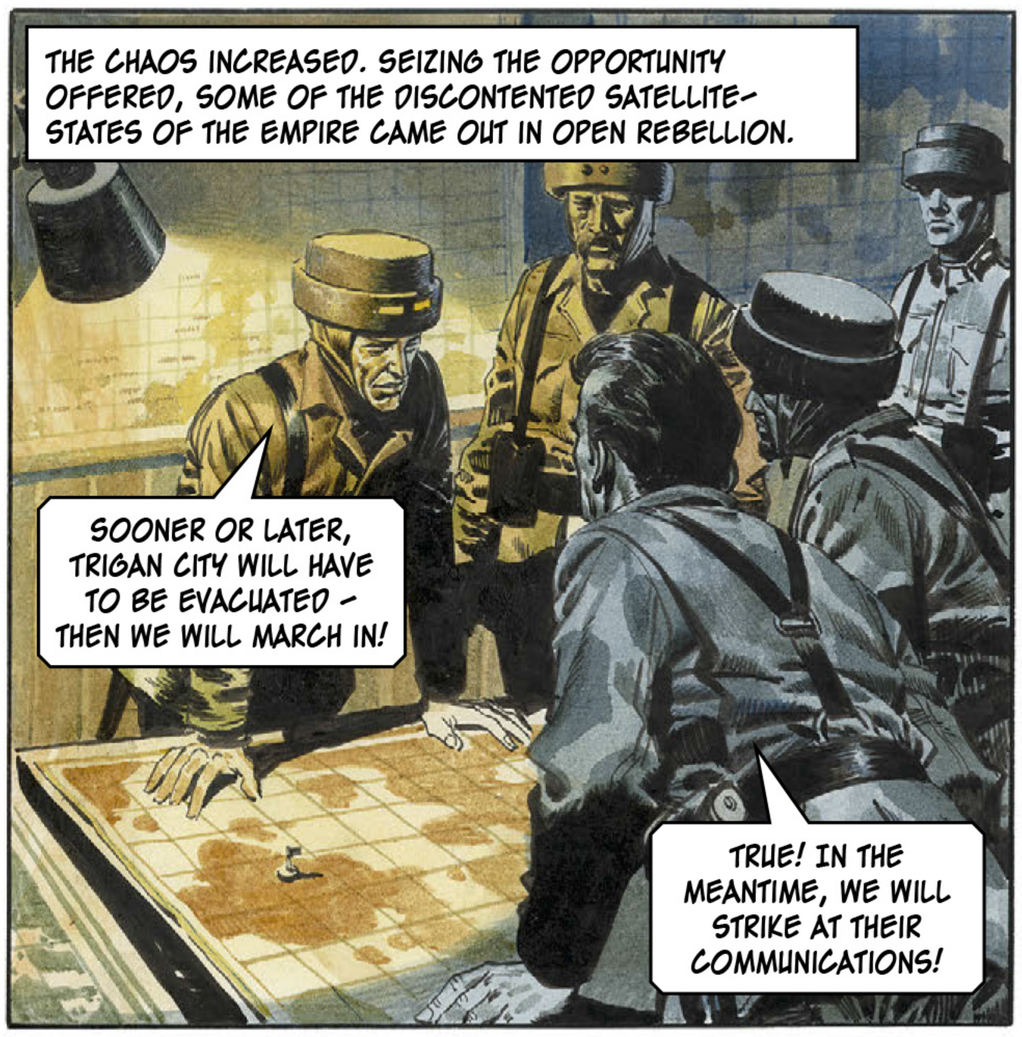
HAVING CLEARED THE STREETS, THE RAVENOUS HORDE BROKE INTO THE CITY GRAIN STORE AND WIPED IT CLEAN.

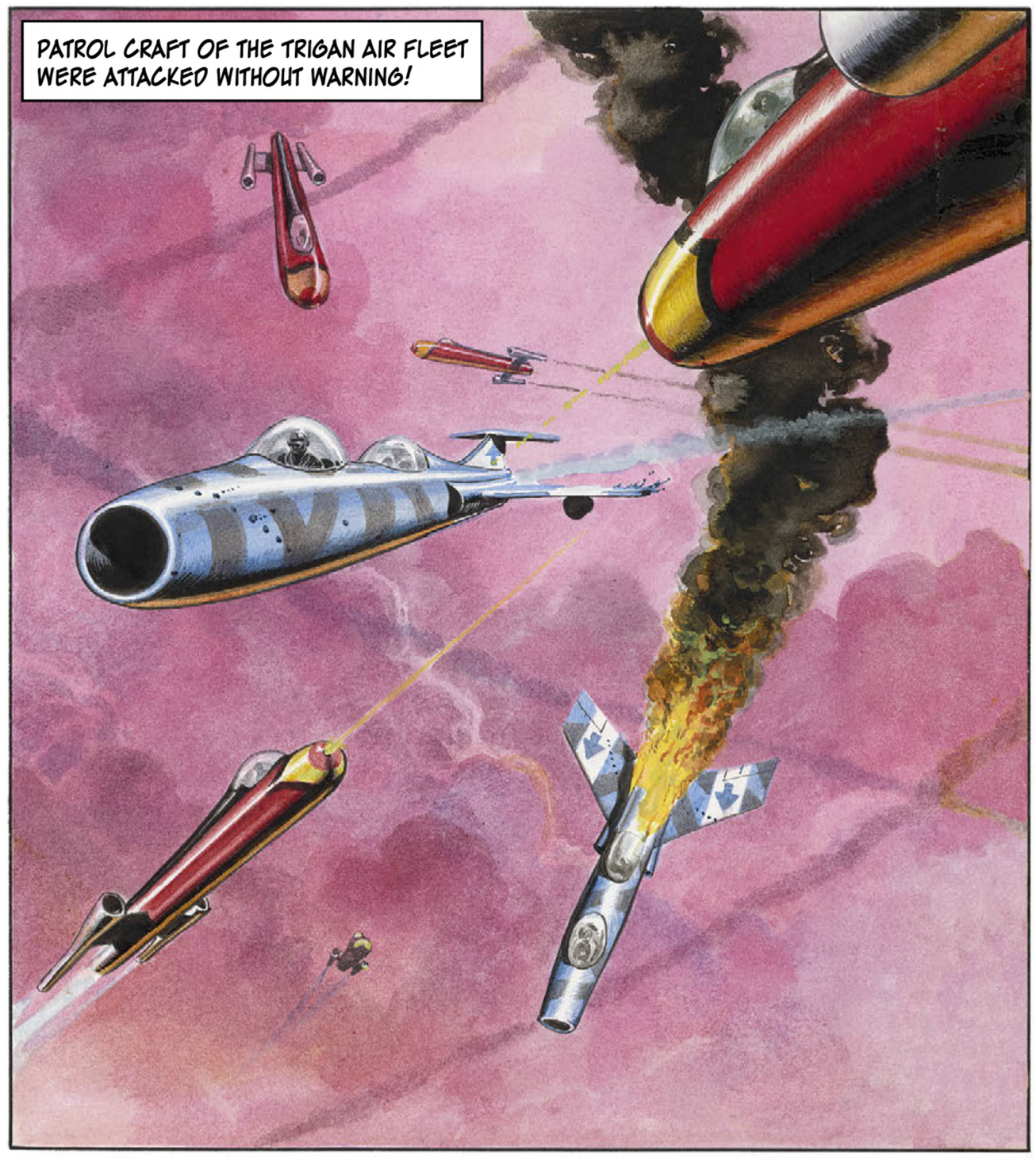
NOTHING COULD SATISFY THEIR VORACIOUS APPETITES. BY NIGHTFALL, THEY HAD GNAWED THE FOUNDATIONS OF SOME OF THE OLDER, WOODEN BUILDINGS TO POWDER – AND THEY COLLAPSED.


THE FOLLOWING DAWN, THE RALLUS HAD RETIRED UNDERGROUND – AND THE HUNGRY, ANGRY POPULACE BESIEGED THE IMPERIAL PALACE.
WHY DOESN'T THE EMPEROR DO SOMETHING?
GIVE US FOOD!
DOWN WITH HIM!

THE EMPEROR SAW IT ALL.
YES! SOMETHING MUST BE DONE – AND QUICKLY! PERIC, I LOOK TO YOU FOR A MEANS OF COMBATING THIS SCOURGE!
IMPERIAL MAJESTY...

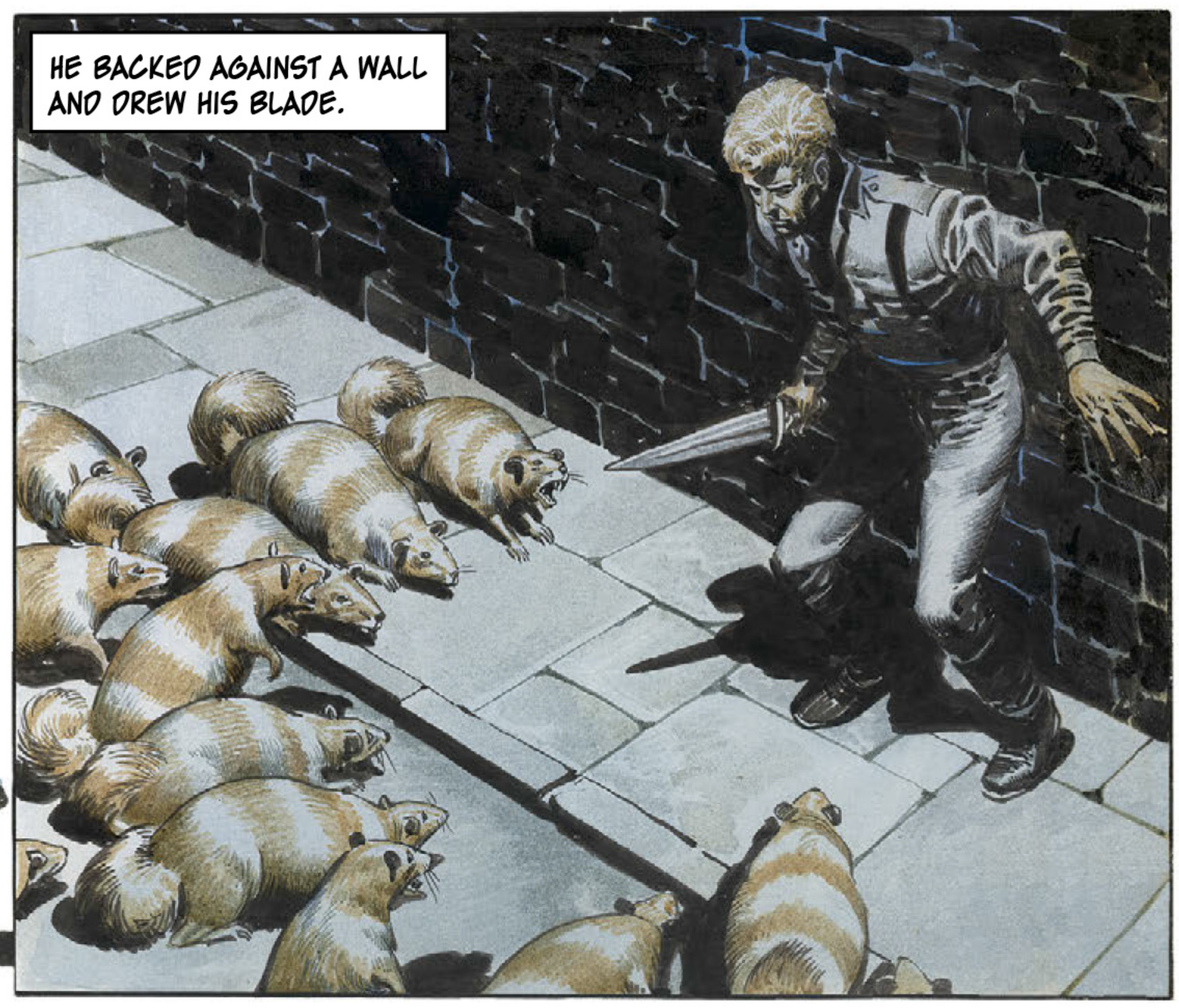

PERIC WAS ELEKTON'S TOP SCIENTIST.
THE GIANT RALLUS ARE LIKE THEIR NORMAL BRETHREN – THEY ARE QUICK AND CUNNING. LIKE ALL RALLUS, THEY REFUSE TO TAKE POISONED BAIT. BUT I AM WORKING ON THE PROBLEM.

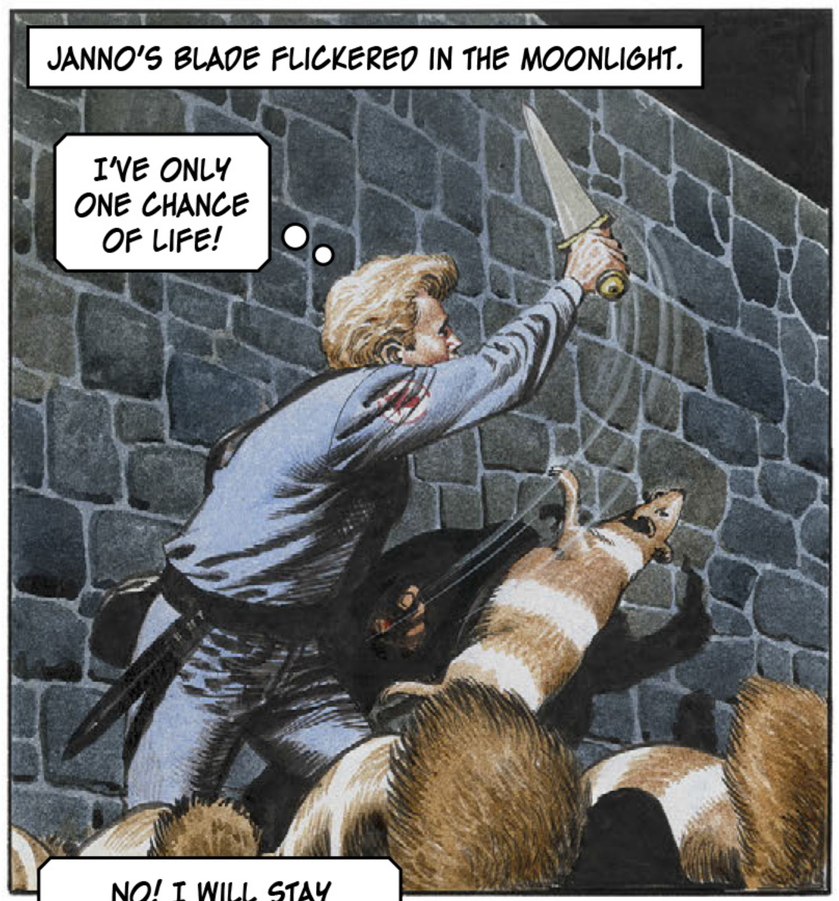

THE CHAOS INCREASED. SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY OFFERED, SOME OF THE DISCONTENTED SATELLITE-STATES OF THE EMPIRE CAME OUT IN OPEN REBELLION.
SOONER OR LATER, TRIGAN CITY WILL HAVE TO BE EVACUATED – THEN WE WILL MARCH IN!
TRUE! IN THE MEANTIME, WE WILL STRIKE AT THEIR COMMUNICATIONS!

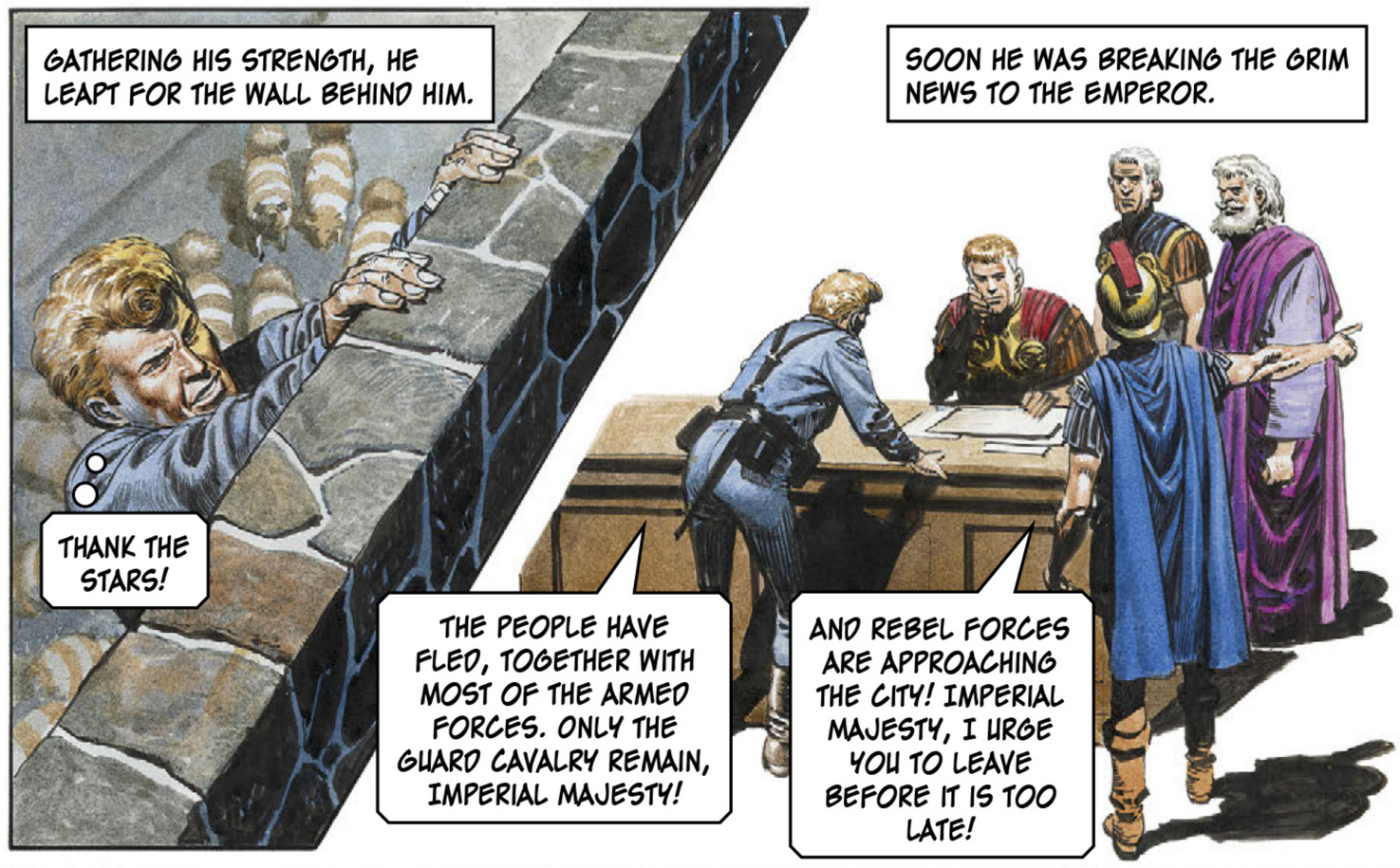

PATROL CRAFT OF THE TRIGAN AIR FLEET WERE ATTACKED WITHOUT WARNING!

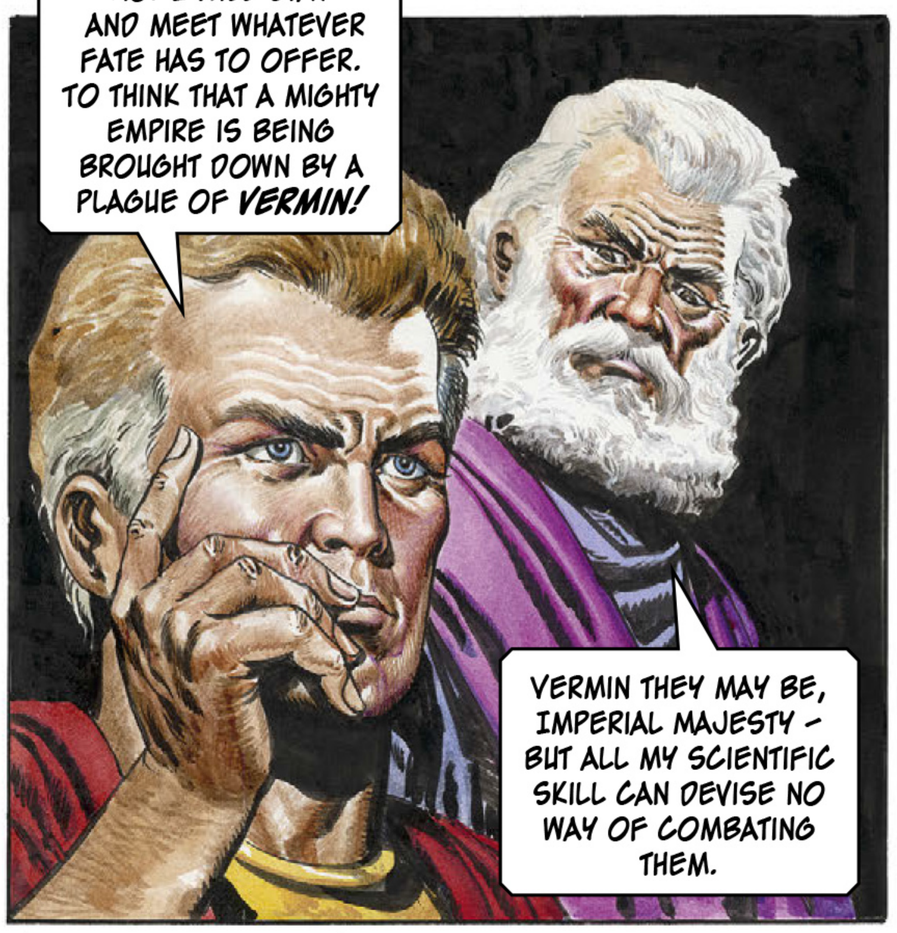
AFTER FOUR DAYS OF THE TERROR, THE POPULATION FLED FROM THE CAPITAL. TRIGAN CITY, ONCE HEART OF A MIGHTY EMPIRE, LAY DYING IN THE NIGHT.

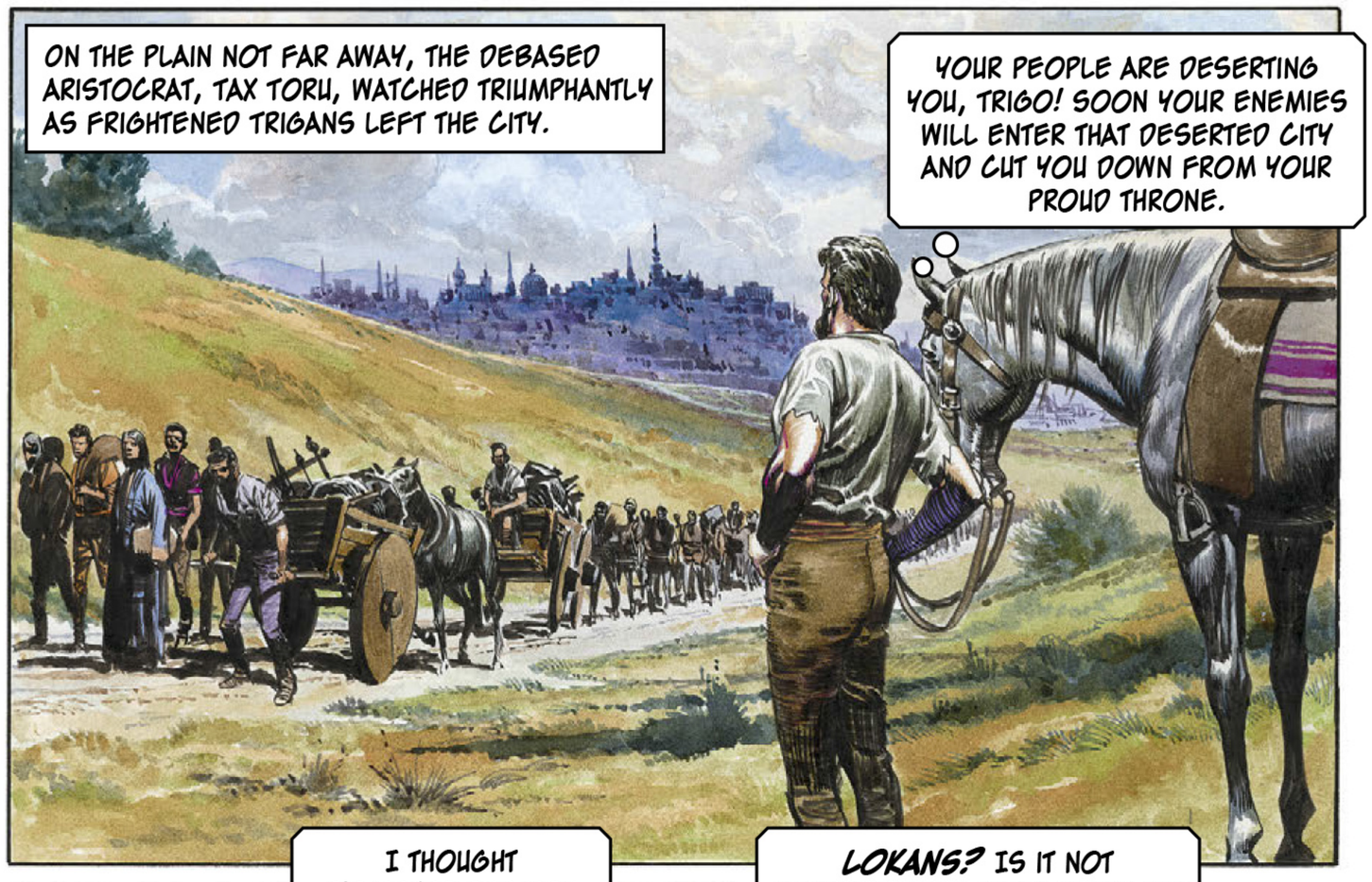
YOUNG JANNO REMAINED ON DUTY, GUARDING HIS EMPEROR. THAT NIGHT, HE WAS CAUGHT OUT ALONE IN THE PERIL-RIDDEN STREETS.
THERE ARE MORE AHEAD OF ME! – I'M CUT OFF!


HE BACKED AGAINST A WALL AND DREW HIS BLADE.

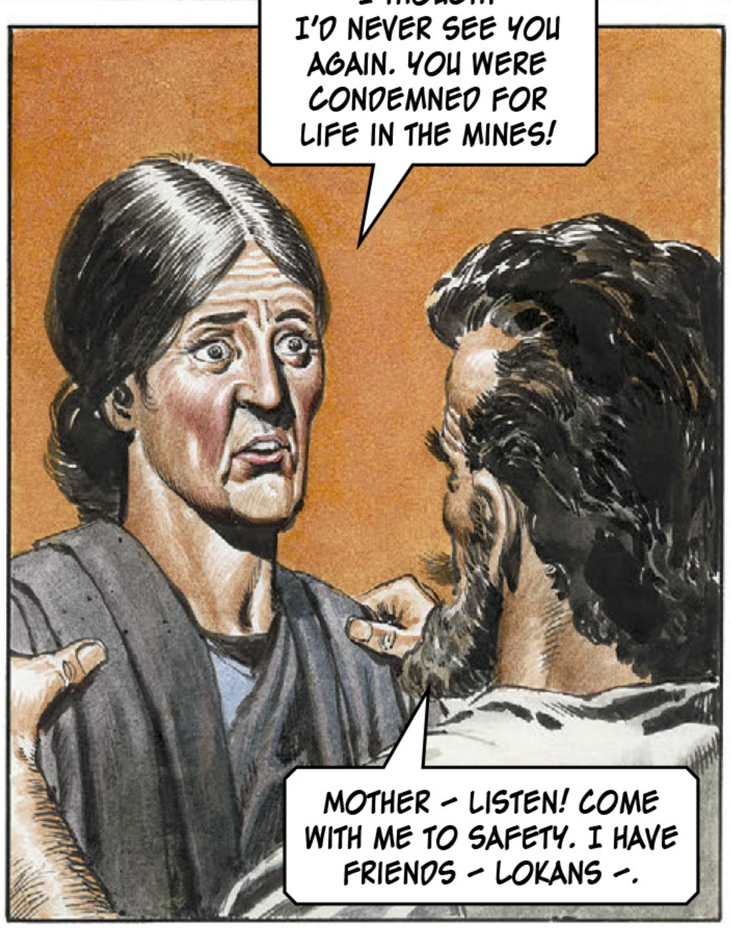

JANNO'S BLADE FLICKERED IN THE MOONLIGHT.
I'VE ONLY ONE CHANCE OF LIFE!


GATHERING HIS STRENGTH, HE LEAPT FOR THE WALL BEHIND HIM.
THANK THE STARS!
SOON HE WAS BREAKING THE GRIM NEWS TO THE EMPEROR.
THE PEOPLE HAVE FLED, TOGETHER WITH MOST OF THE ARMED FORCES. ONLY THE GUARD CAVALRY REMAIN, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!
AND REBEL FORCES ARE APPROACHING THE CITY! IMPERIAL MAJESTY, I URGE YOU TO LEAVE BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!


NO! I WILL STAY AND MEET WHATEVER FATE HAS TO OFFER. TO THINK THAT A MIGHTY EMPIRE IS BEING BROUGHT DOWN BY A PLAGUE OF VERMIN!
VERMIN THEY MAY BE, IMPERIAL MAJESTY – BUT ALL MY SCIENTIFIC SKILL CAN DEVISE NO WAY OF COMBATING THEM.

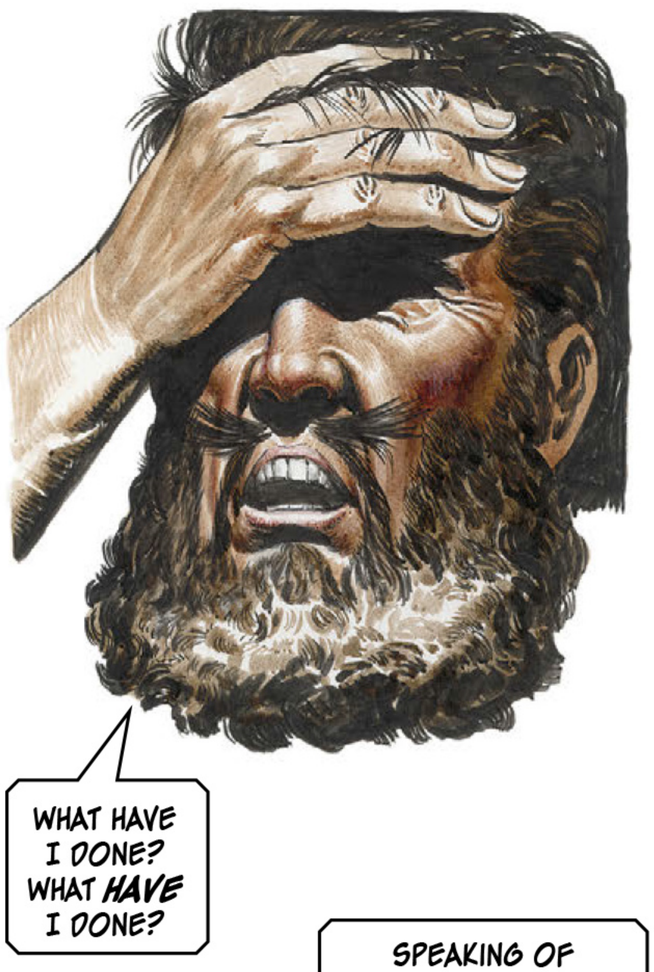

ON THE PLAIN NOT FAR AWAY, THE DEBASED ARISTOCRAT, TAX TORU, WATCHED TRIUMPHANTLY AS FRIGHTENED TRIGANS LEFT THE CITY.
YOUR PEOPLE ARE DESERTING YOU, TRIGO! SOON YOUR ENEMIES WILL ENTER THAT DESERTED CITY AND CUT YOU DOWN FROM YOUR PROUD THRONE.

THEN – A VOICE FROM THE CROWD.
TAX TORU! CAN IT BE YOU, MY SON?
MOTHER!


I THOUGHT I'D NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN. YOU WERE CONDEMNED FOR LIFE IN THE MINES!
MOTHER – LISTEN! COME WITH ME TO SAFETY. I HAVE FRIENDS – LOKANS –.

LOKANS? IS IT NOT ENOUGH THAT I SHOULD SEE MY SON SHAME HIS COUNTRY AND FAMILY NAME? MUST I NOW ACCEPT THAT HE IS CLAIMING FRIENDSHIP WITH LOKANS?

THEN SHE WAS LOST IN THE PASSING CROWD.
MOTHER!


WHAT HAVE I DONE? WHAT HAVE I DONE?

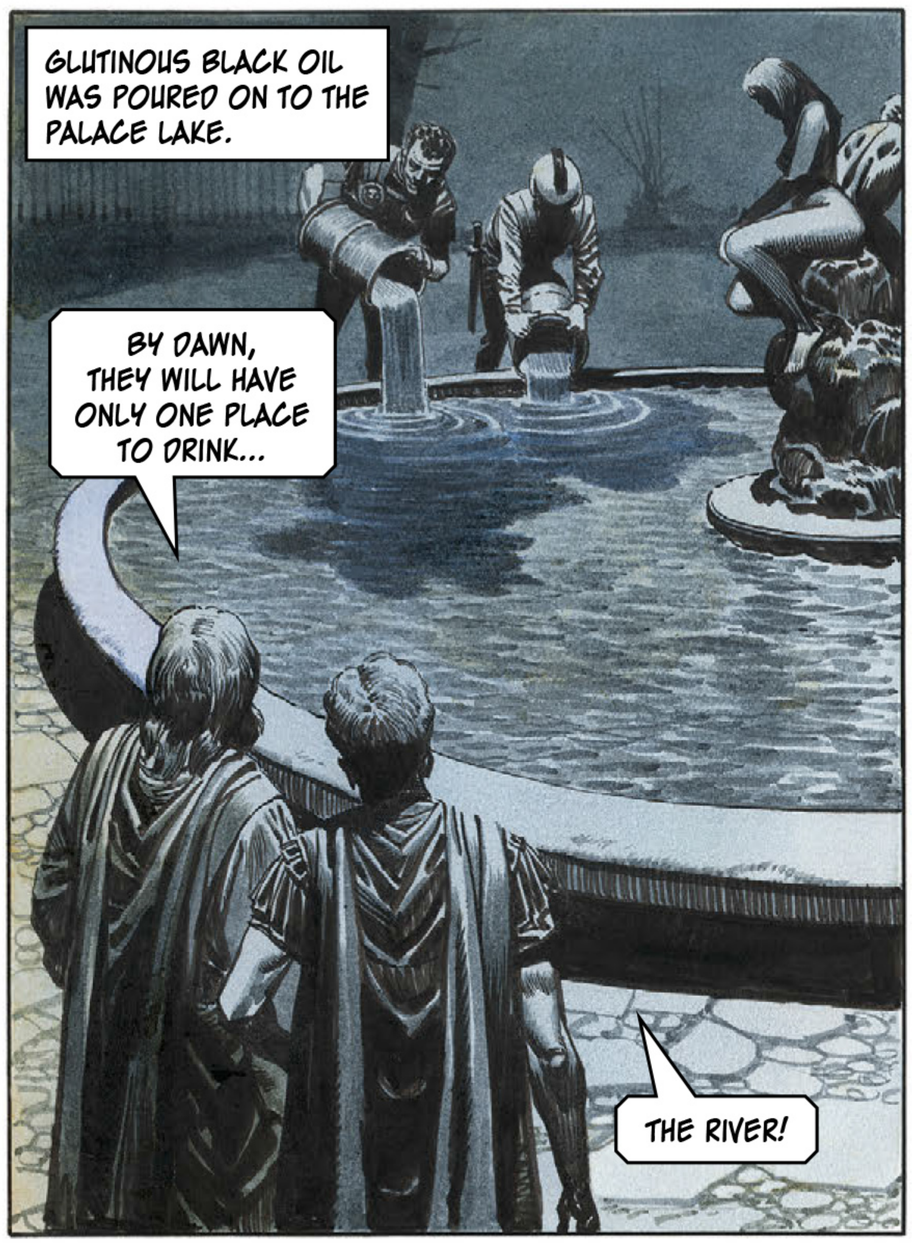
TAX TORU RETURNED TO THE SECRET LOKAN HIDEOUT IN THE HILLS. HE FOUND HIS NEW COMRADES FEASTING.
GREETINGS, TAX TORU.
SIT WITH ME, MY FRIEND. TRIGAN'S ENEMIES ARE APPROACHING THE CITY.
TOMORROW WE WILL COMPLETE THE DESTRUCTION BEGUN BY THE RALLUS!

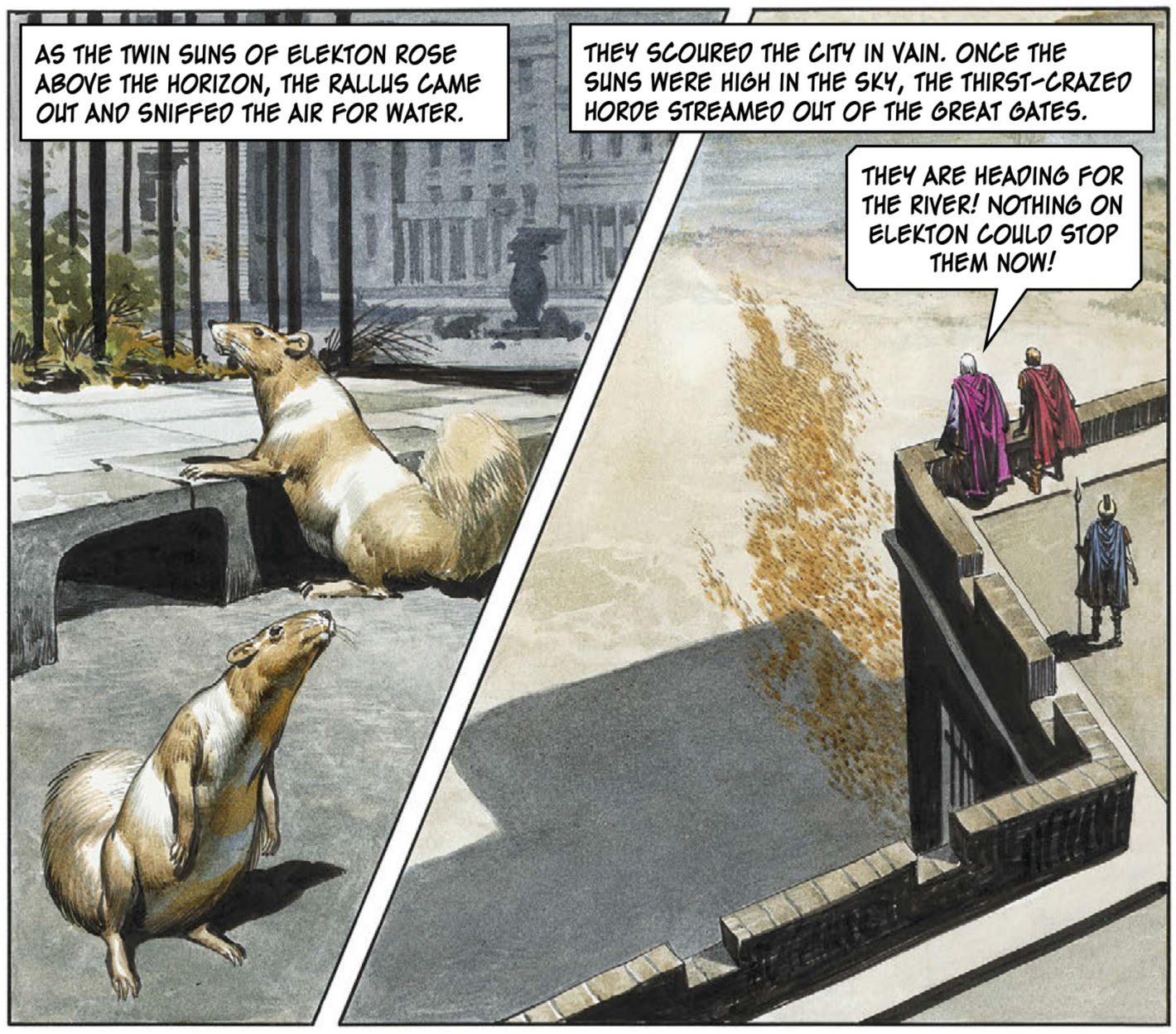
A PLAN WAS ALREADY FORMING IN TAX TORU'S TORTURED MIND.
SPEAKING OF THE RALLUS, FRIEND. I AM PUZZLED AS TO HOW YOU GREW THEM TO SUCH A SIZE.
YOU'RE A FELLOW AFTER MY OWN HEART, THOUGH YOU ARE A TRIGAN. I'LL TELL YOU THE WHOLE STORY.

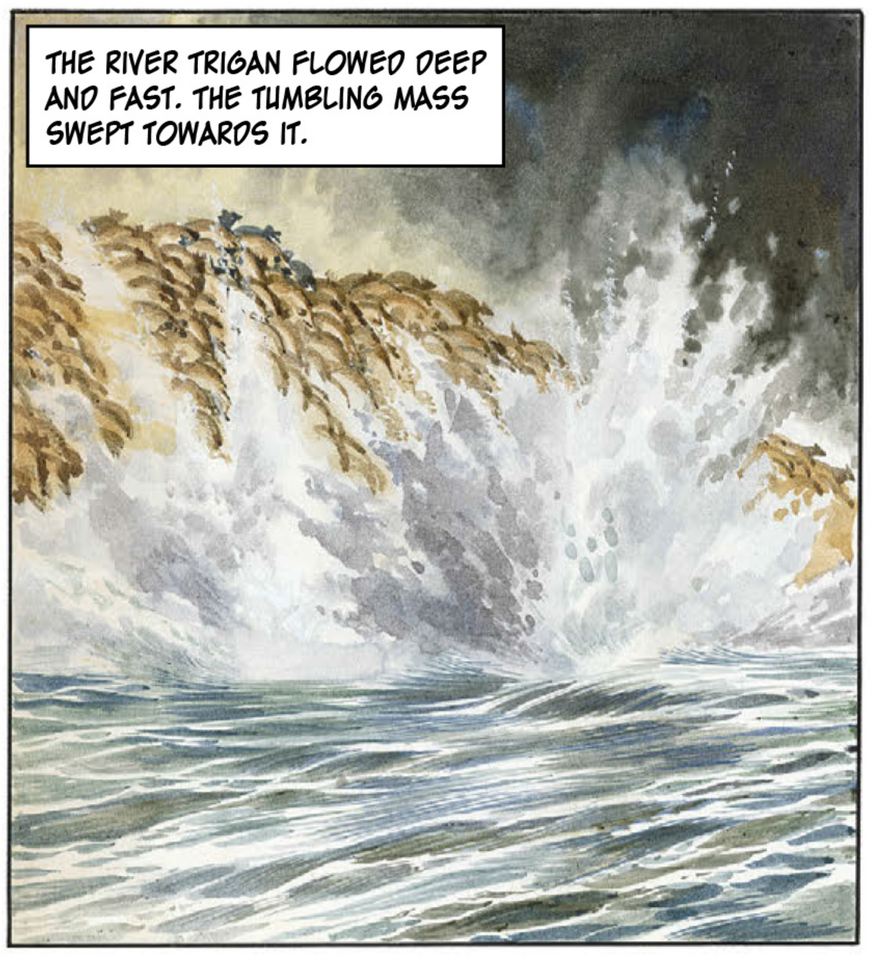
WHEN HIS COMPANION HAD FINISHED, TAX TORU TOOK A FIRMER GRIP ON HIS HEAVY DRINKING HORN.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT, THEN?
YOU HAVE TOLD ME ALL I NEED TO KNOW!

THEN HE STRUCK THE LOKAN AT THE BACK OF THE NECK – AND LEAPT!
STOP HIM – DON'T LET HIM ESCAPE!

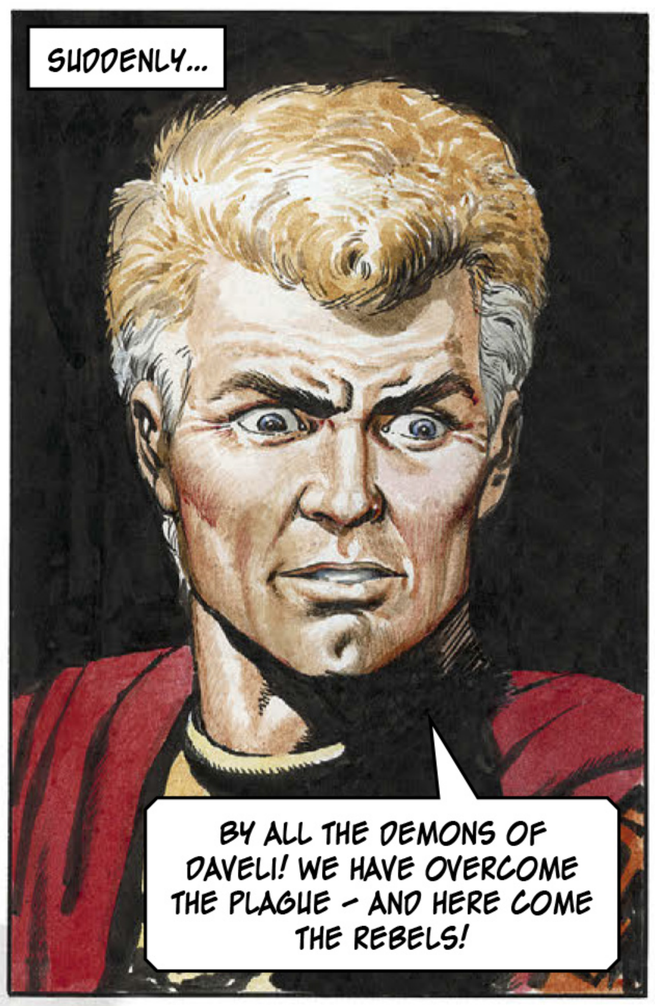
TAX TORU MADE GOOD HIS ESCAPE FROM THE LOKAN STRONGHOLD WITH PROJECTILES SCREAMING ABOUT HIS BENT HEAD.
I AM RIDING FROM ONE CERTAIN DEATH TO ANOTHER – BUT IT MUST BE DONE!
IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING, HE REACHED TRIGAN CITY AND GAINED ADMISSION TO THE IMPERIAL PALACE.
THIS UNKEMPT WRETCH DEMANDS TO SPEAK WITH YOU, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!
WHO ARE YOU – WHAT DO YOU WANT?
TAX TORU TENSED HIMSELF. HE KNEW THAT THE FATE OF AN ESCAPED CONVICT WAS TO BE SLAIN ON SIGHT.
LEAVE HIM! WHY HAVE YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE TO COME HERE?
HE TOLD ALL.
BY ALL THE STARS! THE IBIS PLANT – THE ONE I TREATED WITH MY SPECIAL COMPOUND – MUST HAVE SCATTERED ITS SEEDS ON THE WIND!
I AM TAX TORU – FORMERLY COMMANDER OF YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S GUARD!
THAT TRAITOR!
CUT HIM DOWN!
I KNOW THE SECRET OF THE RALLUS, AND I WISH TO SAVE THE CITY!
YES! THERE IS A PEASANT'S SON WHO GREW TO THE SIZE OF A MAN IN THE SPACE OF A FEW LUNAR MONTHS. AND IT WAS FROM THE CHILD'S FATHER THAT THE LOKANS LEARNED THE WEAKNESS OF ALL WHO EAT THE IBIS SEEDS...
THE RALLU HORDE HAD RETIRED UNDERGROUND. IN THE HOURS BEFORE DAWN, GUARDS SET TO WORK IN THE SILENT CITY.
THEY HAVE A MAD CRAVING FOR WATER!
OF COURSE! THE SWIFTLY-MULTIPLYING BODY-CELLS WOULD REQUIRE VAST QUANTITIES OF LIQUID. THIS GIVES US A WEAPON TO DESTROY THE RALLUS!
EVERY DROP OF WATER IN THE CITY MUST BE POURED AWAY OR MADE UNDRINKABLE!

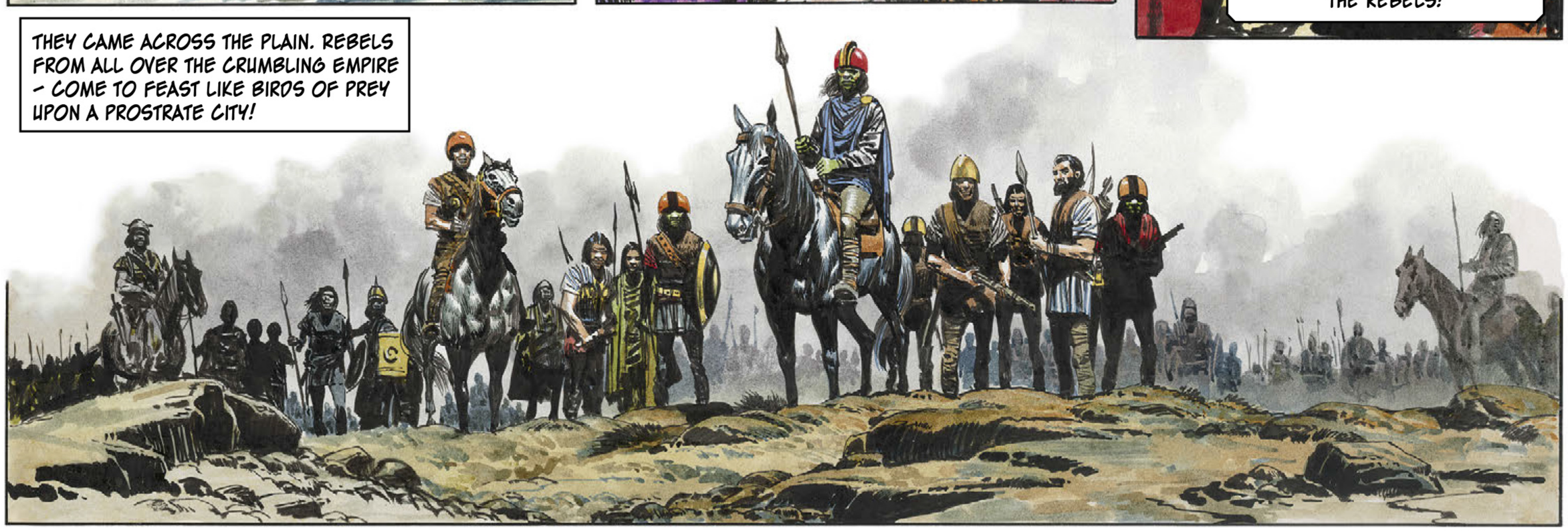

GLUTINOUS BLACK OIL WAS POURED ON TO THE PALACE LAKE.
BY DAWN, THEY WILL HAVE ONLY ONE PLACE TO DRINK...
THE RIVER!


AS THE TWIN SUNS OF ELEKTON ROSE ABOVE THE HORIZON, THE RALLUS CAME OUT AND SNIFFED THE AIR FOR WATER.
THEY SCOURED THE CITY IN VAIN. ONCE THE SUNS WERE HIGH IN THE SKY, THE THIRST-CRAZED HORDE STREAMED OUT OF THE GREAT GATES.
THEY ARE HEADING FOR THE RIVER! NOTHING ON ELEKTON COULD STOP THEM NOW!


THE RIVER TRIGAN FLOWED DEEP AND FAST. THE TUMBLING MASS SWEPT TOWARDS IT.

TRIGO AND HIS COMPANIONS WATCHED FROM THE RAMPARTS. IT WAS SOON OVER.
DROWNED BY THEIR UNQUENCHABLE CRAVING.
EVERY LAST ONE...

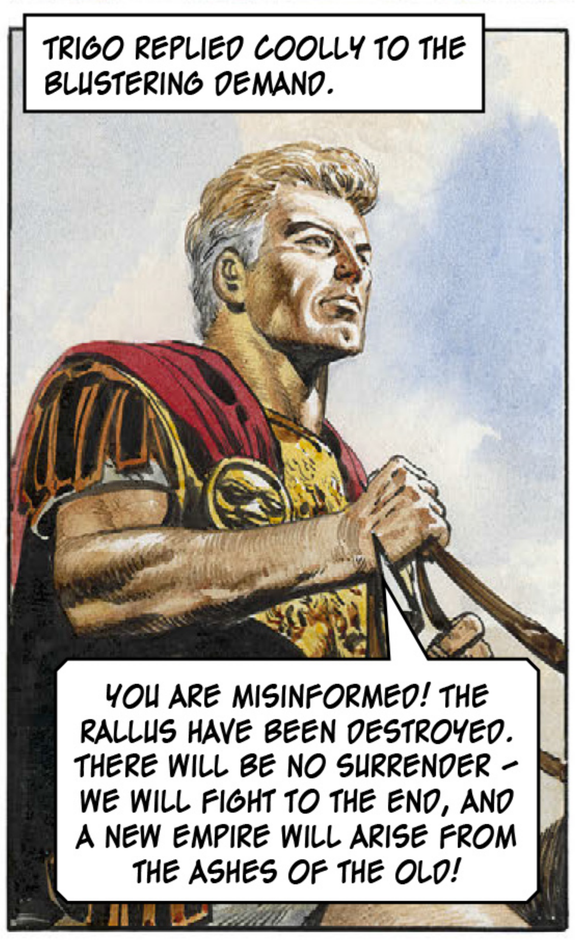

SUDDENLY...
BY ALL THE DEMONS OF DAVELI! WE HAVE OVERCOME THE PLAGUE - AND HERE COME THE REBELS!


THEY CAME ACROSS THE PLAIN. REBELS FROM ALL OVER THE CRUMBLING EMPIRE - COME TO FEAST LIKE BIRDS OF PREY UPON A PROSTRATE CITY!

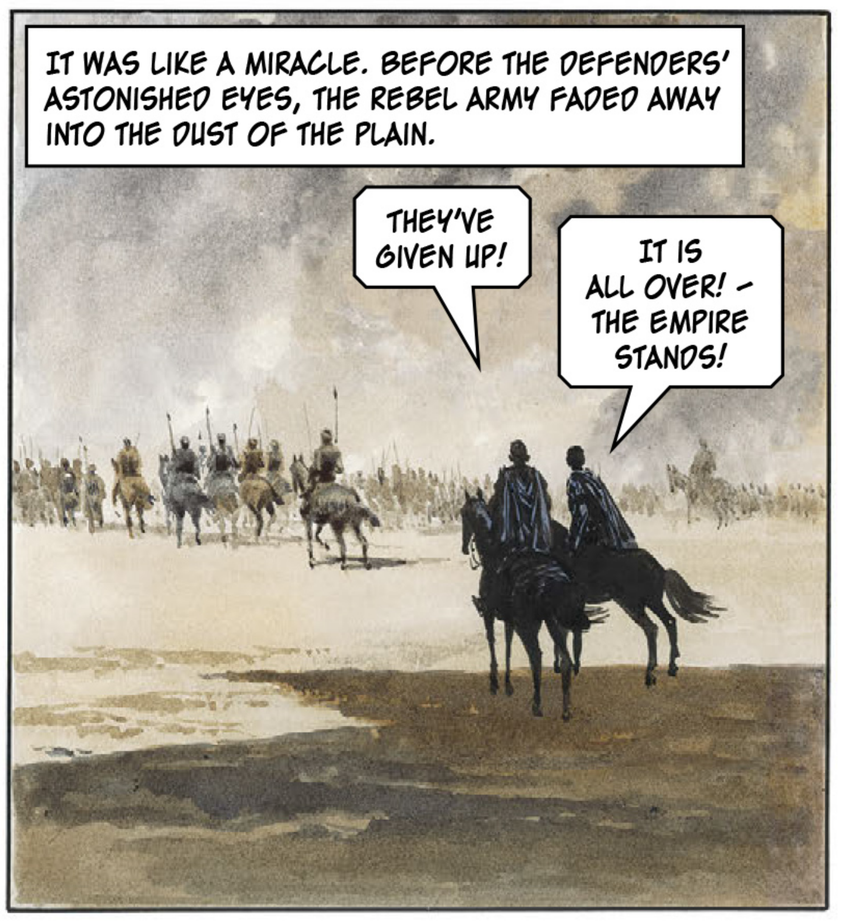
IN THE GREAT SQUARE OF TRIGAN CITY, THE CAVALRY OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD FORMED UP BEHIND THEIR EMPEROR FOR WHAT PROMISED TO BE THEIR LAST BATTLE.

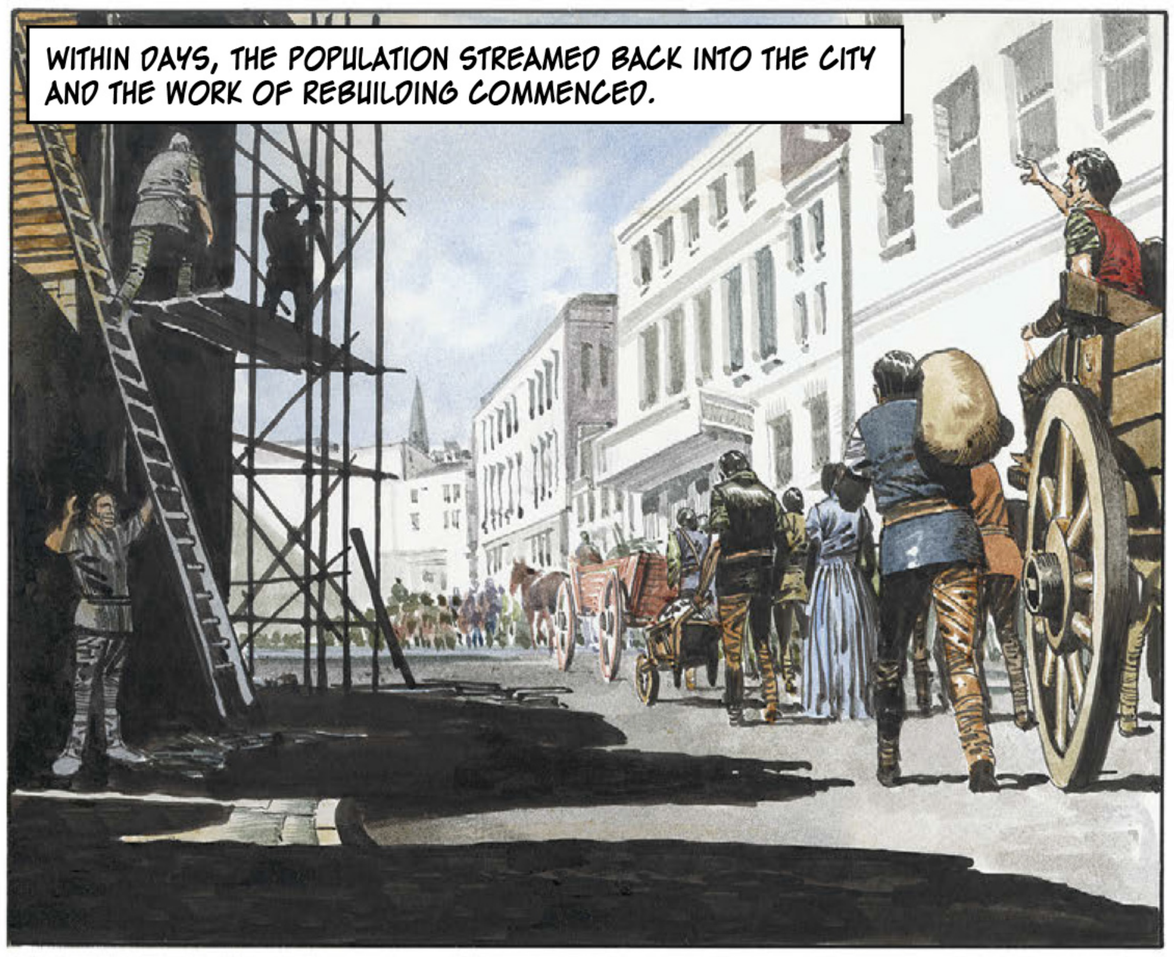
TAX TORU, THE DISGRACED GUARD COMMANDER, CAME FORWARD.
IMPERIAL MAJESTY! I CLAIM THE HONOUR OF DYING WITH YOU!
GRANTED!

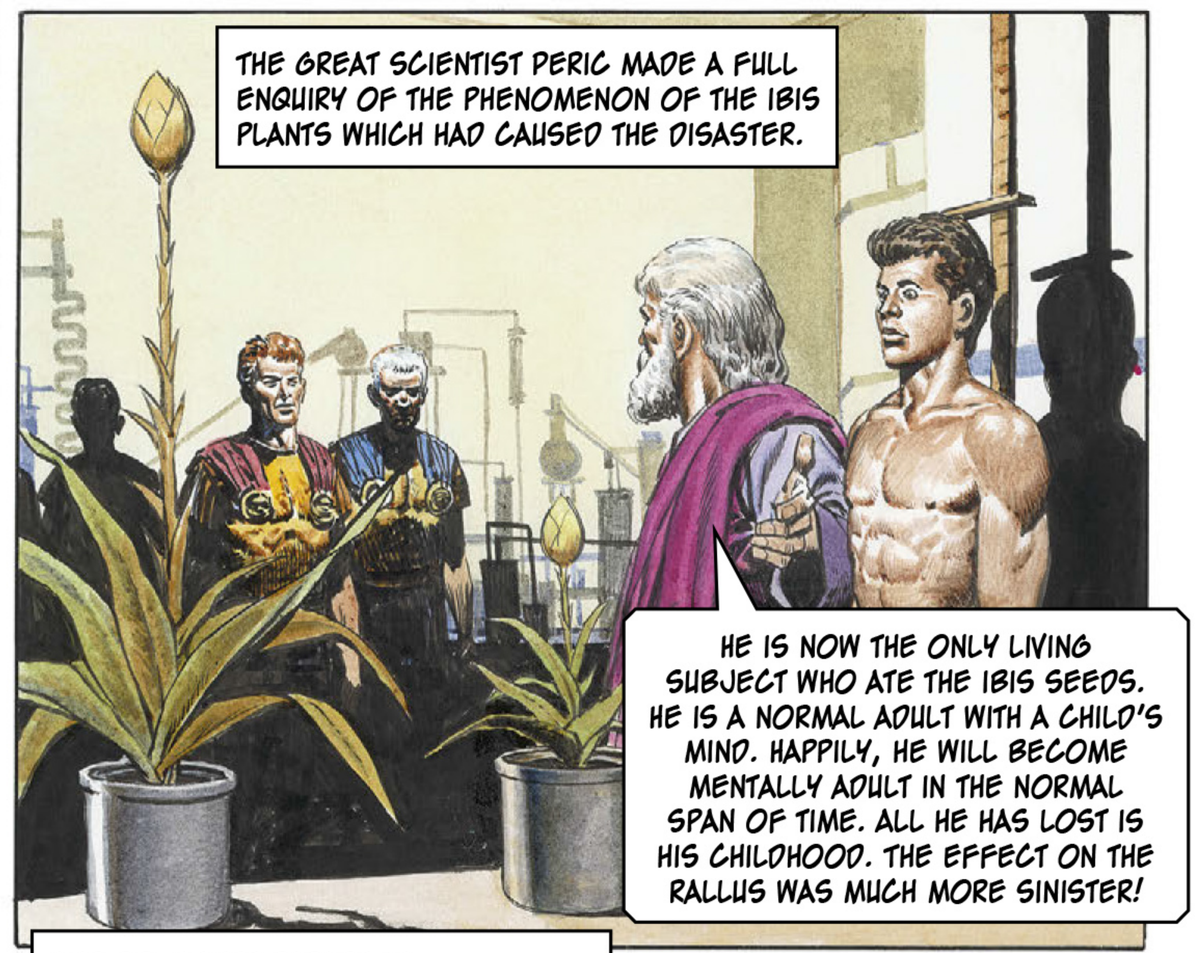
WHEN THE LEADERS OF THE REBEL FORCES SAW THE THIN LINE OF CAVALRY BARRING THEIR WAY INTO THE CITY, SOME OF THEIR CONFIDENCE LEFT THEM.
TRIGO! YOUR CITY IS BEING DEVASTATED BY THE GIANT RALLUS AND YOUR EMPIRE IS CRUMBLING ABOUT YOUR EARS – WE CALL UPON YOU TO SURRENDER!


TRIGO REPLIED COOLLY TO THE BLUSTERING DEMAND.
YOU ARE MISINFORMED! THE RALLUS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED. THERE WILL BE NO SURRENDER – WE WILL FIGHT TO THE END, AND A NEW EMPIRE WILL ARISE FROM THE ASHES OF THE OLD!

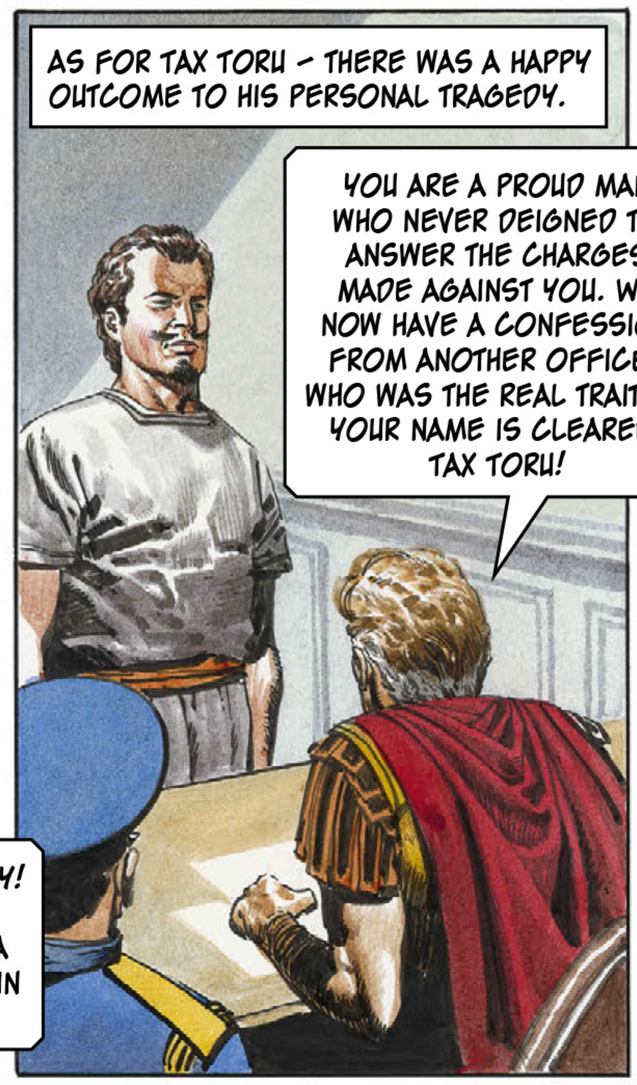
UNEASY MURMURINGS BROKE OUT IN THE REBEL RANKS.
YOU HEAR THAT? TRIGO'S BEATEN THE RALLUS!
WHAT A MAN! THERE'S NO ONE LIKE HIM ON ELEKTON!
ARE WE GOING TO REPLACE HIM WITH THE LIKES OF THEM?
I'M NOT, FOR ONE!

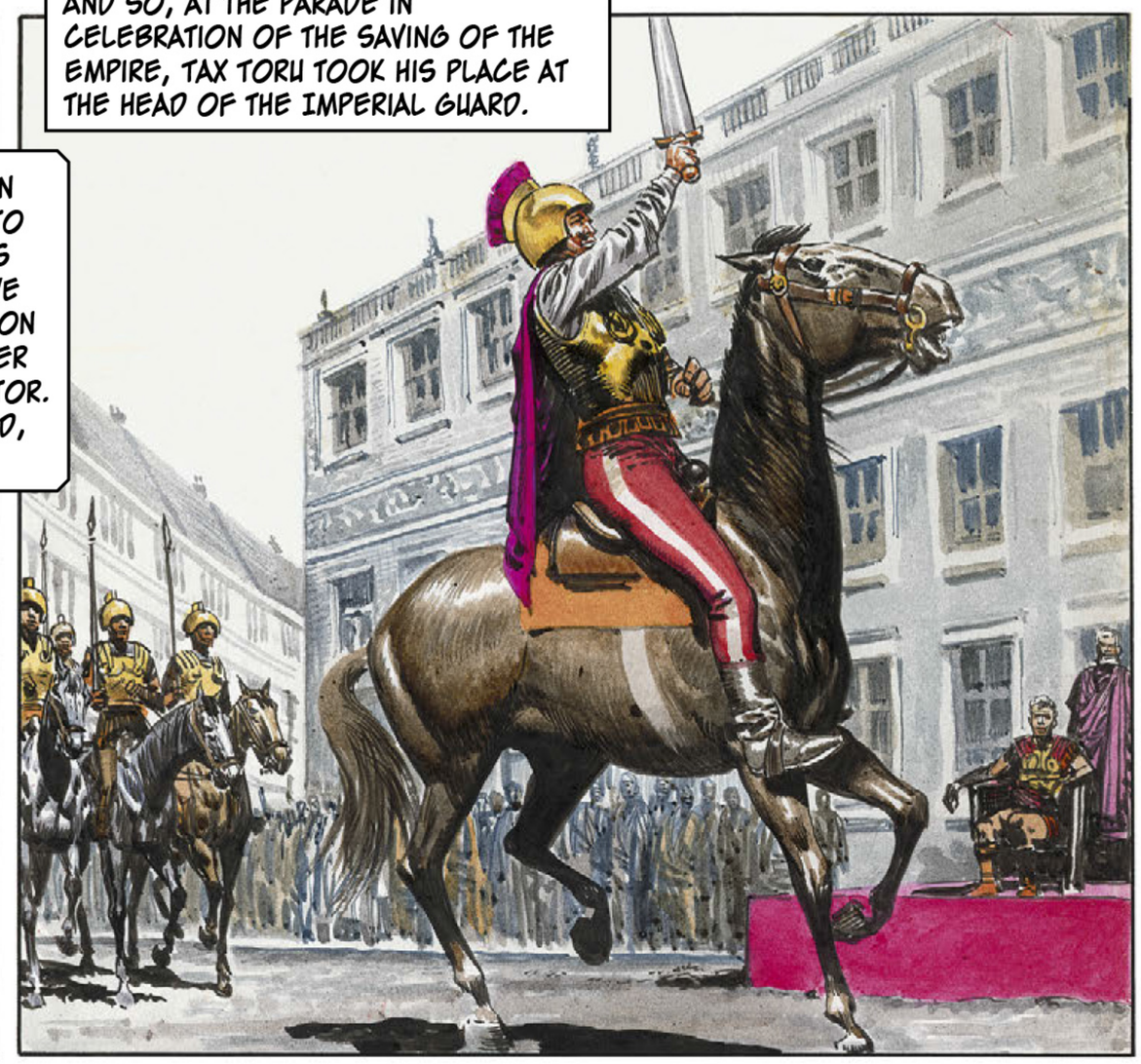

IT WAS LIKE A MIRACLE. BEFORE THE DEFENDERS' ASTONISHED EYES, THE REBEL ARMY FADED AWAY INTO THE DUST OF THE PLAIN.
THEY'VE GIVEN UP!
IT IS ALL OVER! – THE EMPIRE STANDS!

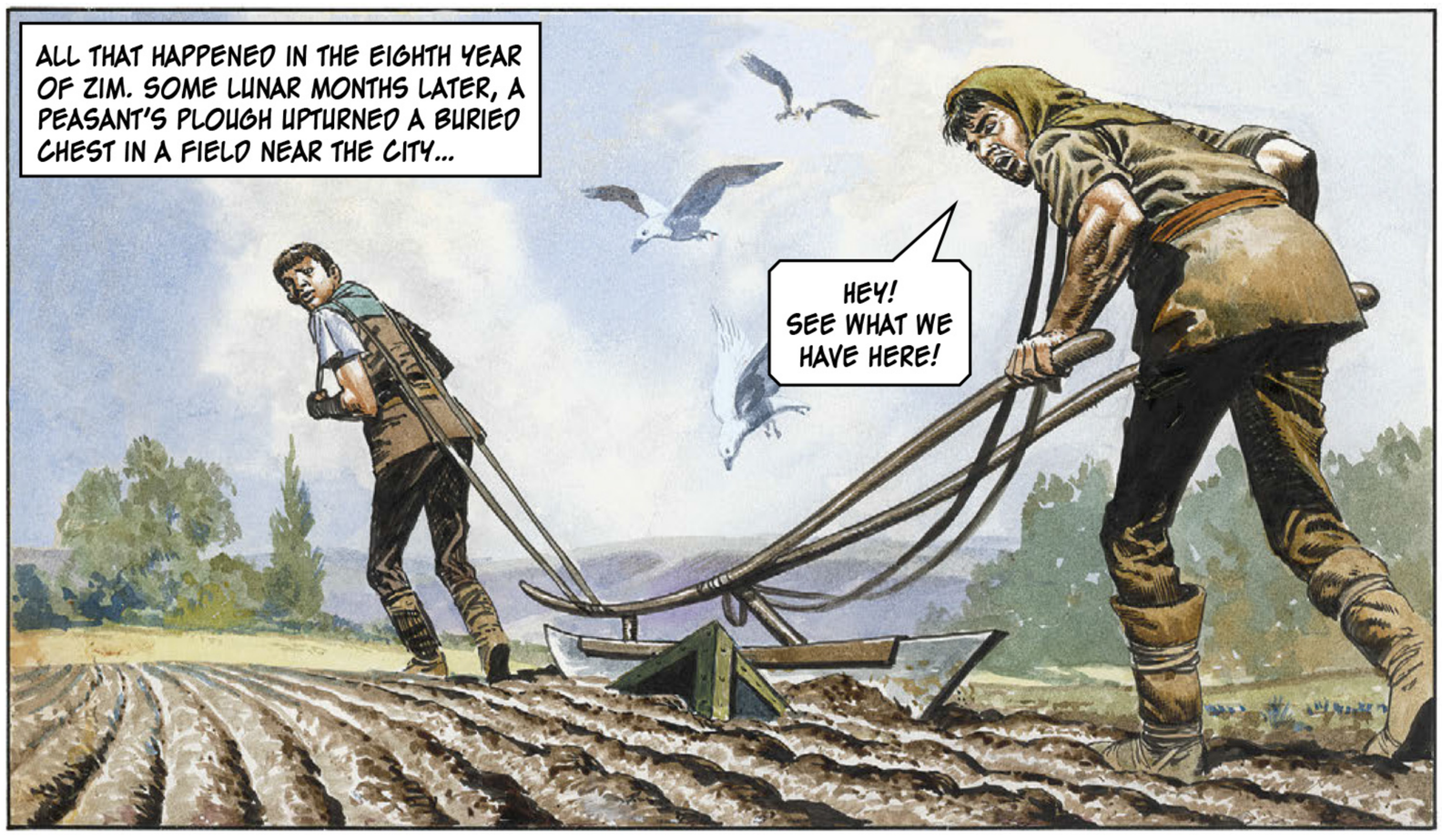

WITHIN DAYS, THE POPULATION STREAMED BACK INTO THE CITY AND THE WORK OF REBUILDING COMMENCED.


THE GREAT SCIENTIST PERIC MADE A FULL ENQUIRY OF THE PHENOMENON OF THE IBIS PLANTS WHICH HAD CAUSED THE DISASTER.
HE IS NOW THE ONLY LIVING SUBJECT WHO ATE THE IBIS SEEDS. HE IS A NORMAL ADULT WITH A CHILD'S MIND. HAPPILY, HE WILL BECOME MENTALLY ADULT IN THE NORMAL SPAN OF TIME. ALL HE HAS LOST IS HIS CHILDHOOD. THE EFFECT ON THE RALLUS WAS MUCH MORE SINISTER!

PERIC, IT MUST NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN!
NOR WILL IT, IMPERIAL MAJESTY! THE GIANT IBISES WILL BE DESTROYED AND THE FORMULA OF THE COMPOUND WILL REMAIN LOCKED IN MY MIND!


AS FOR TAX TORU – THERE WAS A HAPPY OUTCOME TO HIS PERSONAL TRAGEDY.
YOU ARE A PROUD MAN WHO NEVER DEIGNED TO ANSWER THE CHARGES MADE AGAINST YOU. WE NOW HAVE A CONFESSION FROM ANOTHER OFFICER WHO WAS THE REAL TRAITOR. YOUR NAME IS CLEARED, TAX TORU!


AND SO, AT THE PARADE IN CELEBRATION OF THE SAVING OF THE EMPIRE, TAX TORU TOOK HIS PLACE AT THE HEAD OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD.


ALL THAT HAPPENED IN THE EIGHTH YEAR OF ZIM. SOME LUNAR MONTHS LATER, A PEASANT'S PLOUGH UPTURNED A BURIED CHEST IN A FIELD NEAR THE CITY...
HEY! SEE WHAT WE HAVE HERE!

WHAT IS IT, EH?
THAT'S NOT FOR THE LIKES OF US TO SAY, FATHER. BEST TO TAKE IT TO THE AUTHORITIES.

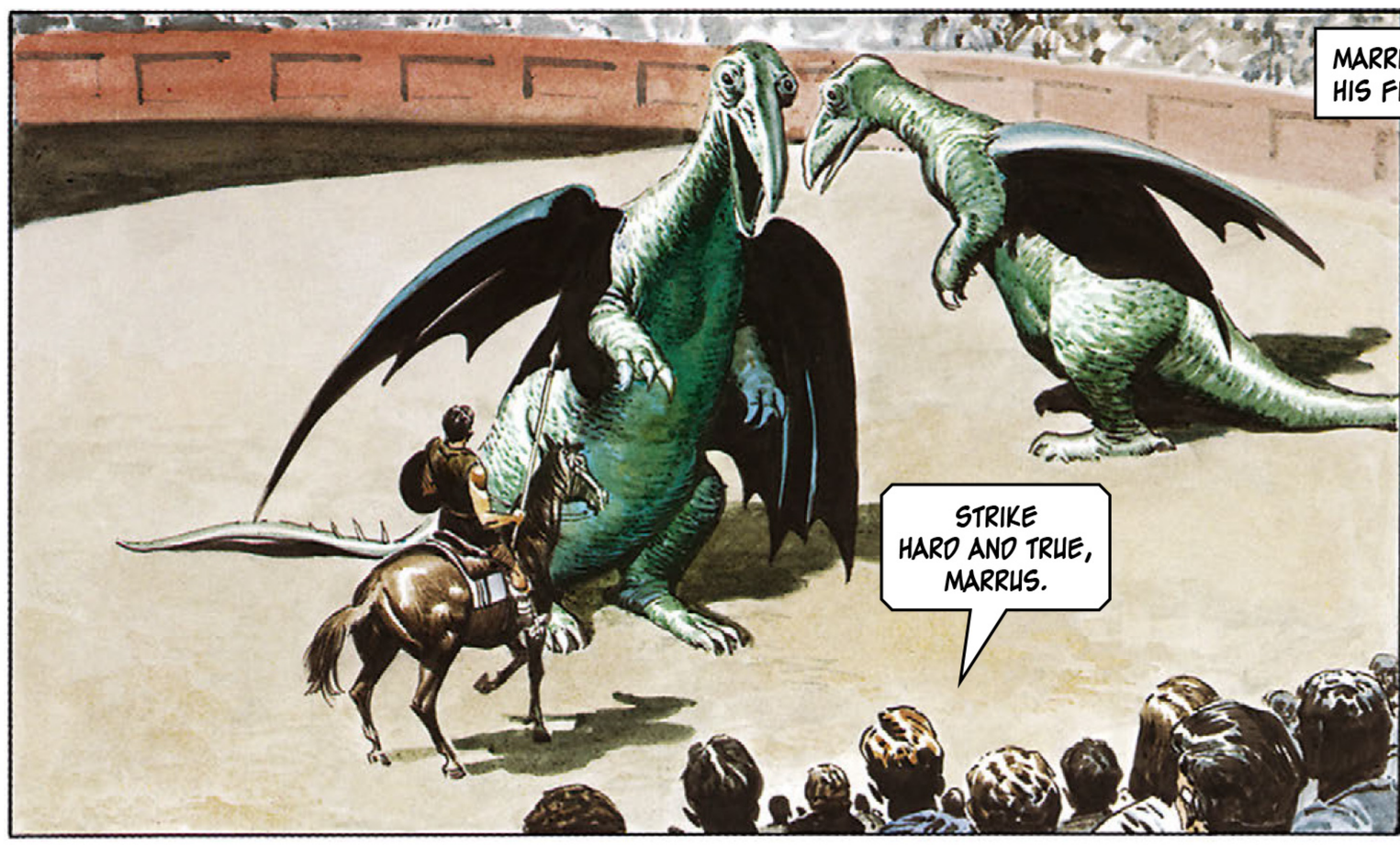
VII

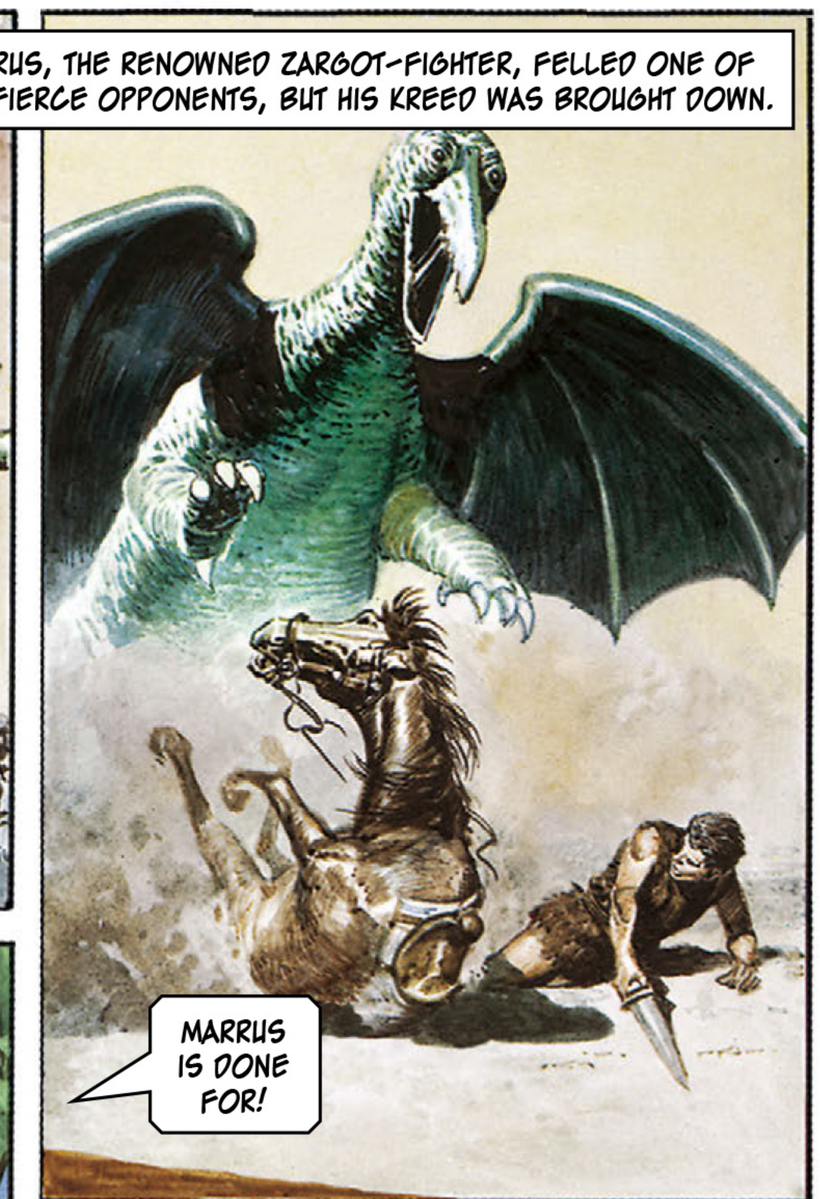
THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

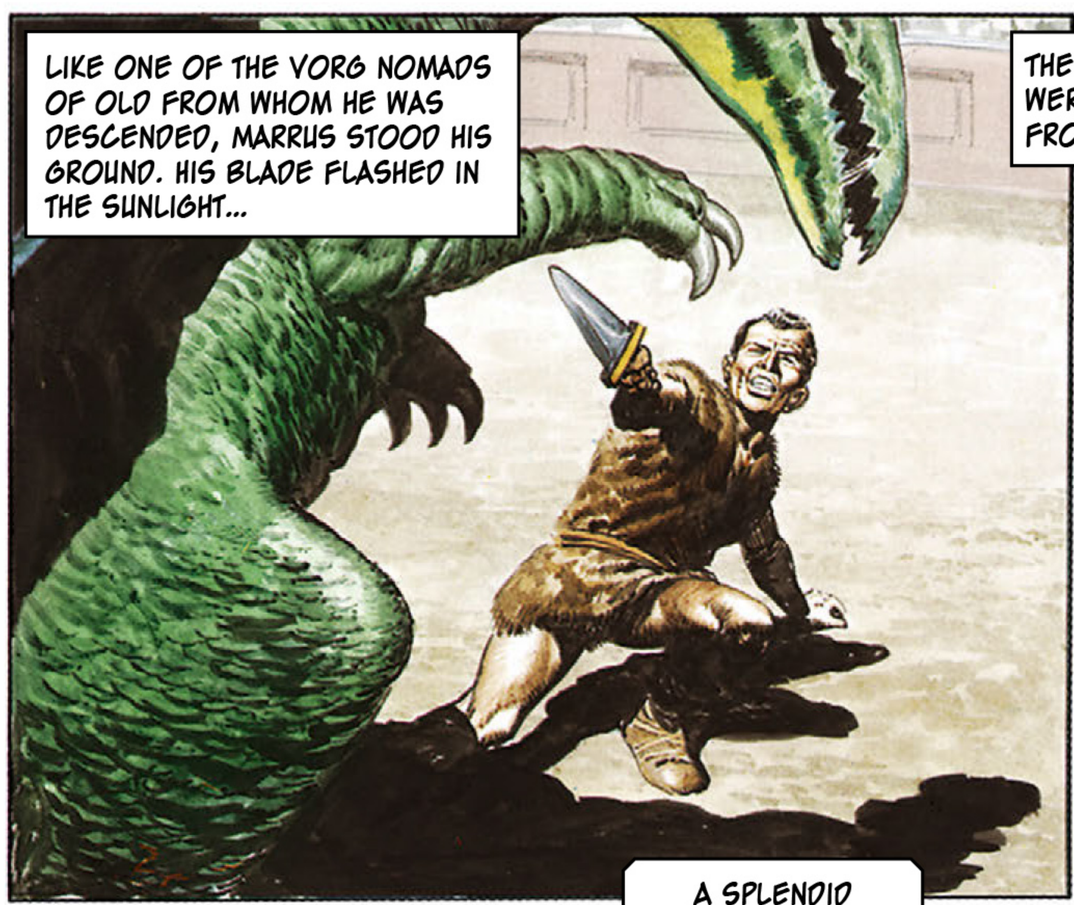
THE CITY OF JEWELS

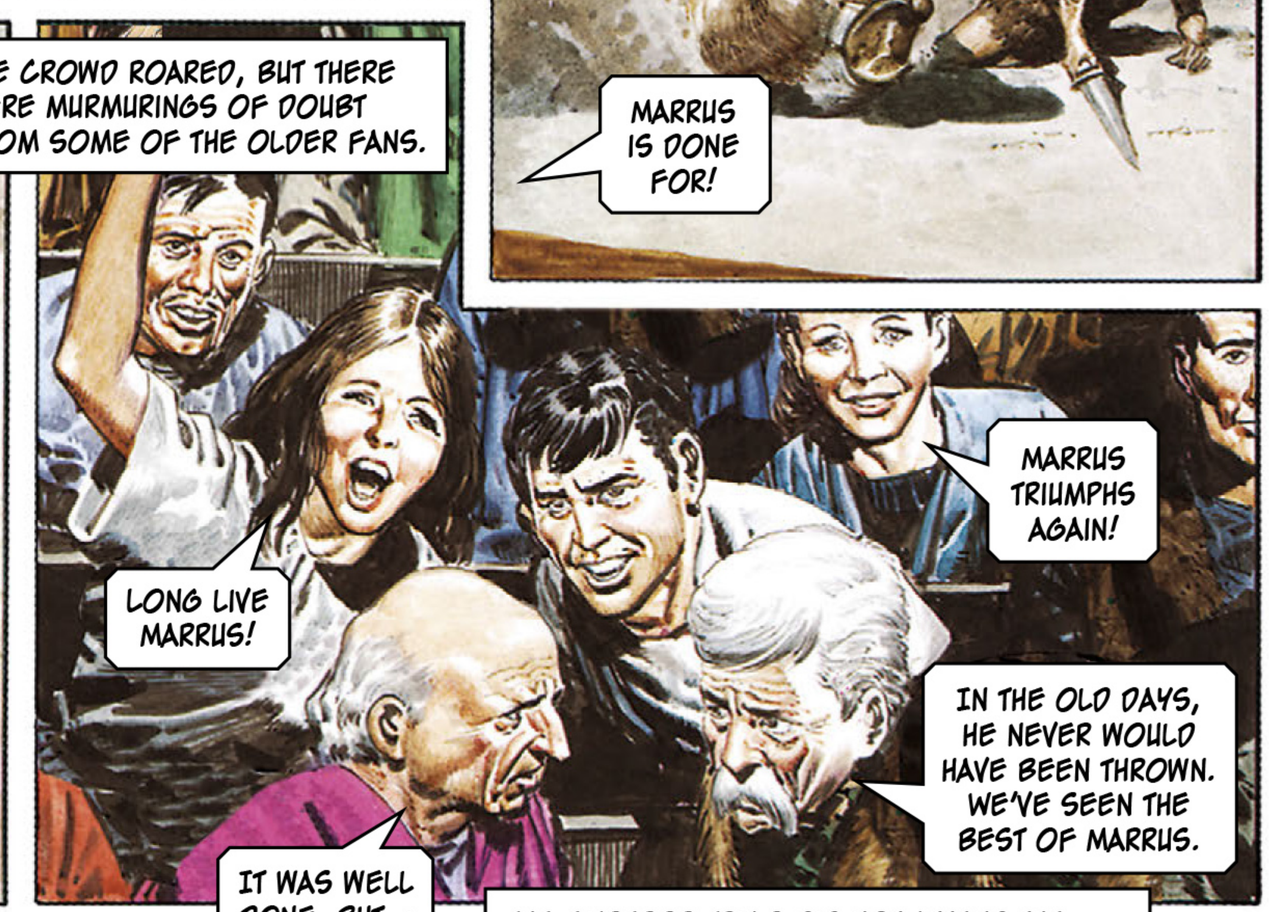
Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 481-488

3rd April 1971 – 22nd May 1971


STRIKE HARD AND TRUE, MARRUS.

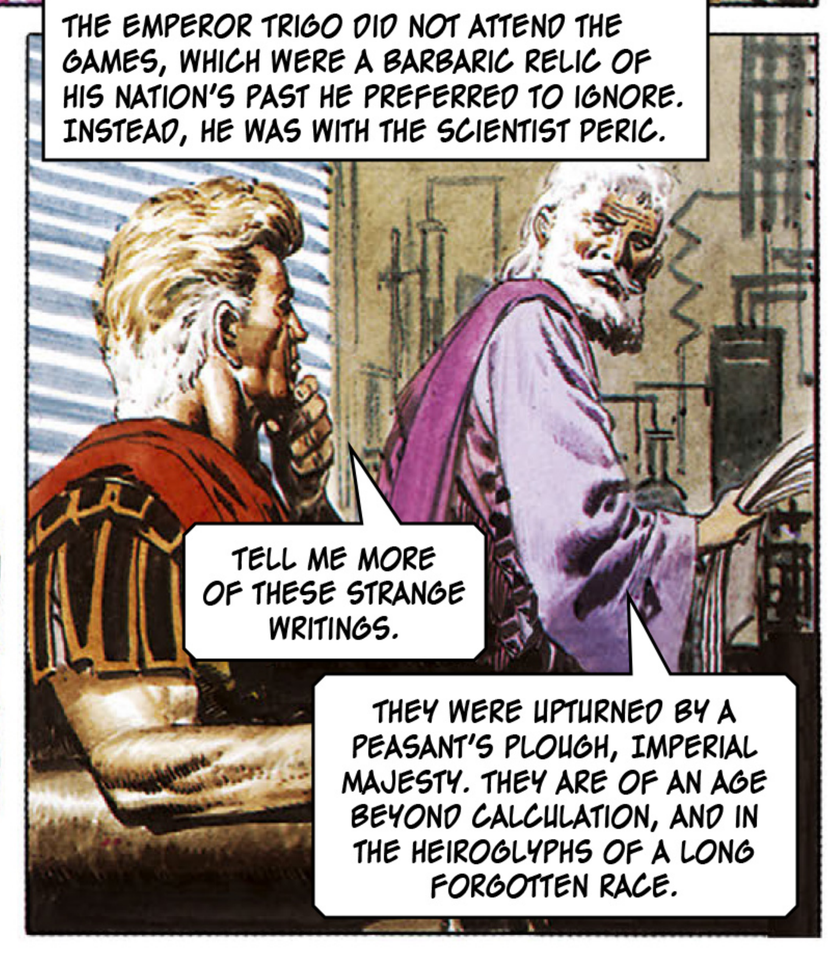

MARRUS, THE RENOWNED ZARGOT-FIGHTER, FELLED ONE OF HIS FIERCE OPPONENTS, BUT HIS KREED WAS BROUGHT DOWN.
MARRUS IS DONE FOR!

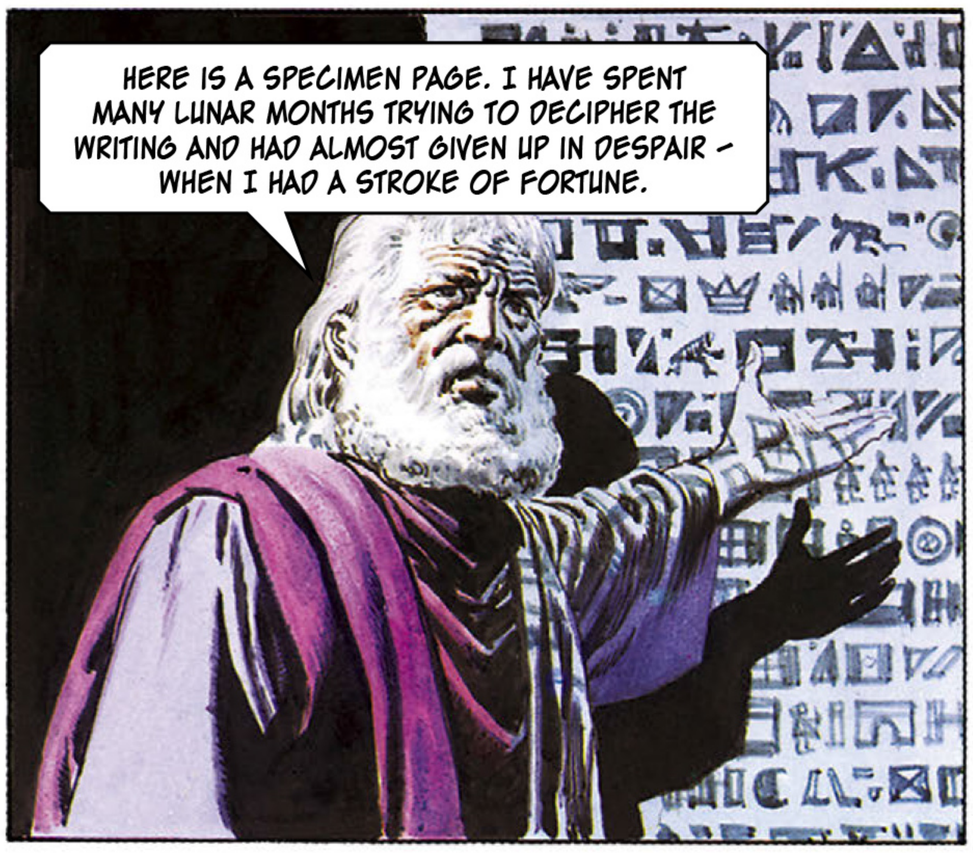

LIKE ONE OF THE VORG NOMADS OF OLD FROM WHOM HE WAS DESCENDED, MARRUS STOOD HIS GROUND. HIS BLADE FLASHED IN THE SUNLIGHT...


THE CROWD ROARED, BUT THERE WERE MURMURINGS OF DOUBT FROM SOME OF THE OLDER FANS.
LONG LIVE MARRUS!
MARRUS TRIUMPHS AGAIN!
IN THE OLD DAYS, HE NEVER WOULD HAVE BEEN THROWN. WE'VE SEEN THE BEST OF MARRUS.

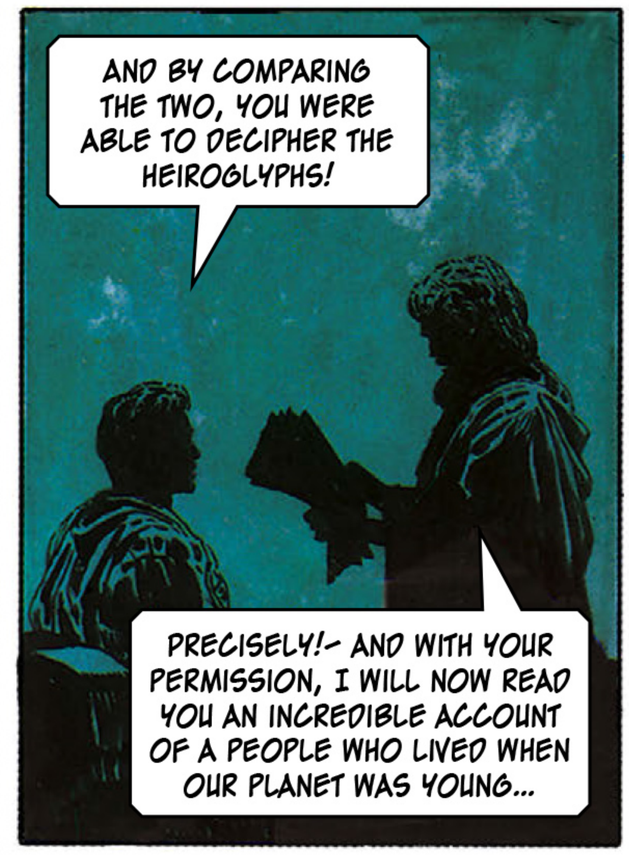
MARRUS RETURNED TO HIS DRESSING ROOM AND THREW HIMSELF DOWN.
A SPLENDID FIGHT – AND A GREAT TRIUMPH!
SPARE ME YOUR SMOOTH TONGUED FLATTERY, MAN! I'M PAST MY BEST AND YOU KNOW IT! ONE DAY SOON, I'LL BE CARRIED OUT OF THE RING, A DEAD MAN!

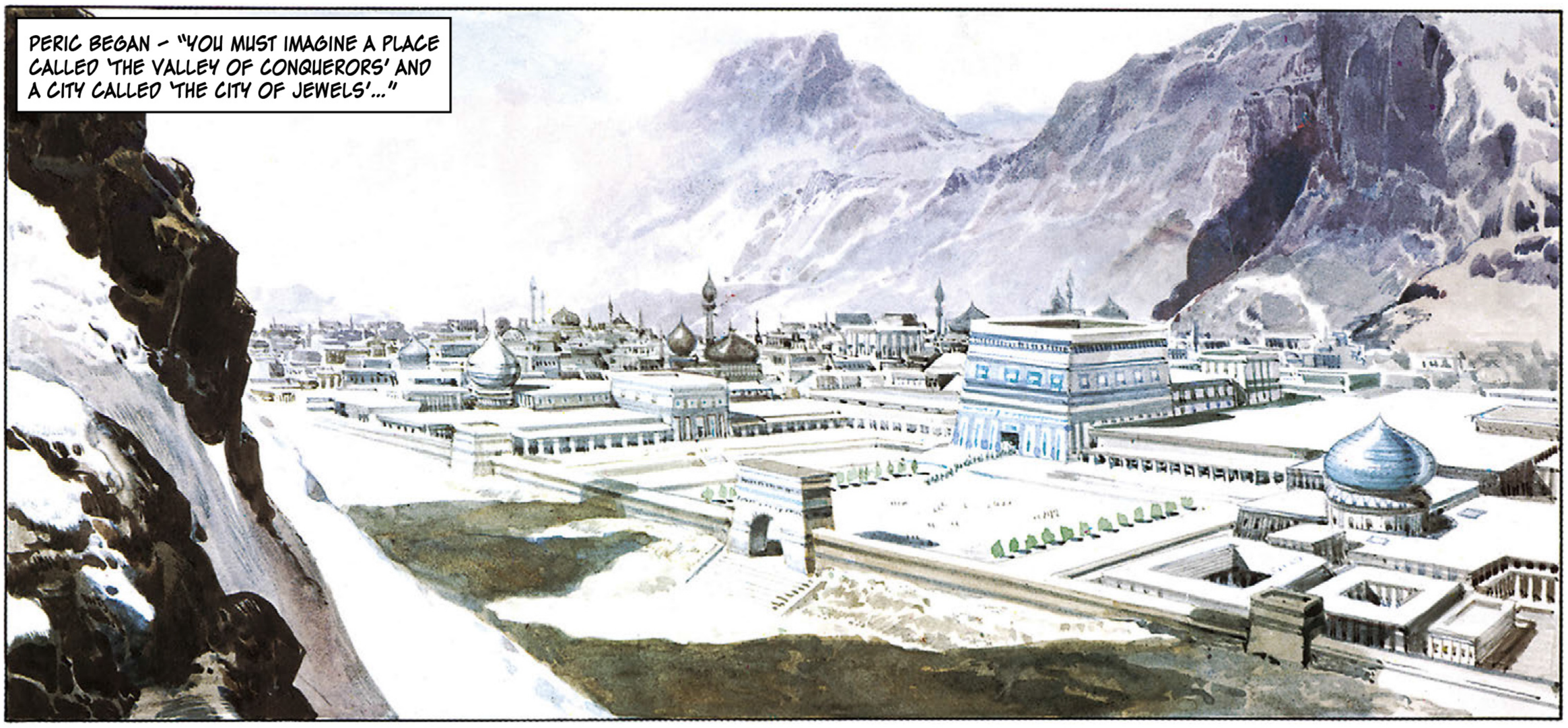
IT WAS WELL DONE, BUT –
NOT THAT THAT WILL WORRY ME UNDULY – THE VERY THOUGHT OF GROWING OLD AND LOSING MY STRENGTH FILLS ME WITH DREAD!


THE EMPEROR TRIGO DID NOT ATTEND THE GAMES, WHICH WERE A BARBARIC RELIC OF HIS NATION'S PAST HE PREFERRED TO IGNORE. INSTEAD, HE WAS WITH THE SCIENTIST PERIC.
TELL ME MORE OF THESE STRANGE WRITINGS.
THEY WERE UPTURNED BY A PEASANT'S PLOUGH, IMPERIAL MAJESTY. THEY ARE OF AN AGE BEYOND CALCULATION, AND IN THE HEIROGLYPHS OF A LONG FORGOTTEN RACE.

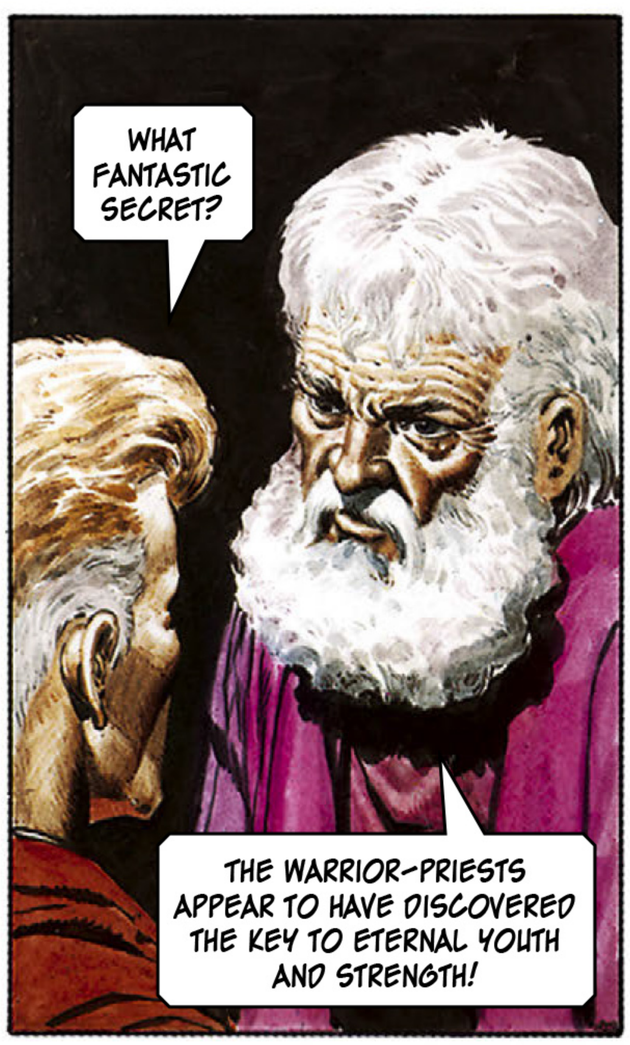

HERE IS A SPECIMEN PAGE. I HAVE SPENT MANY LUNAR MONTHS TRYING TO DECIPHER THE WRITING AND HAD ALMOST GIVEN UP IN DESPAIR – WHEN I HAD A STROKE OF FORTUNE.

IN THE RUINS OF THE ANCIENT TEMPLE OF VORG, I DISCOVERED THIS DUAL INSCRIPTION, WHICH IS AN ACCOUNT OF A SOLAR ECLIPSE WRITTEN IN ANCIENT TRIGAN – AND IN THE STRANGE HEIROGLYPHS!

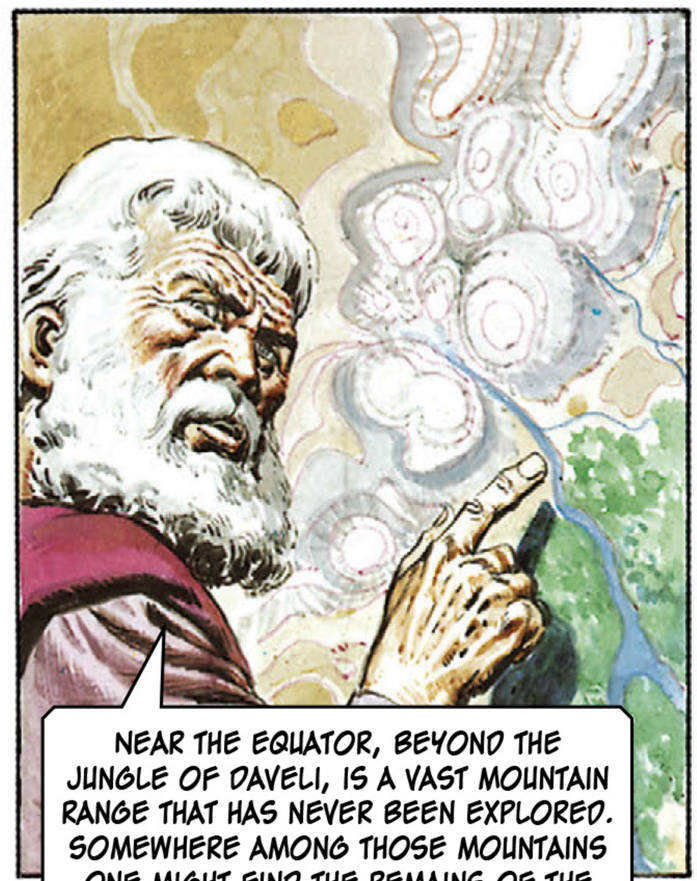

AND BY COMPARING THE TWO, YOU WERE ABLE TO DECIPHER THE HEIROGLYPHS!
PRECISELY!– AND WITH YOUR PERMISSION, I WILL NOW READ YOU AN INCREDIBLE ACCOUNT OF A PEOPLE WHO LIVED WHEN OUR PLANET WAS YOUNG...


PERIC BEGAN – "YOU MUST IMAGINE A PLACE CALLED 'THE VALLEY OF CONQUERORS' AND A CITY CALLED 'THE CITY OF JEWELS'..."

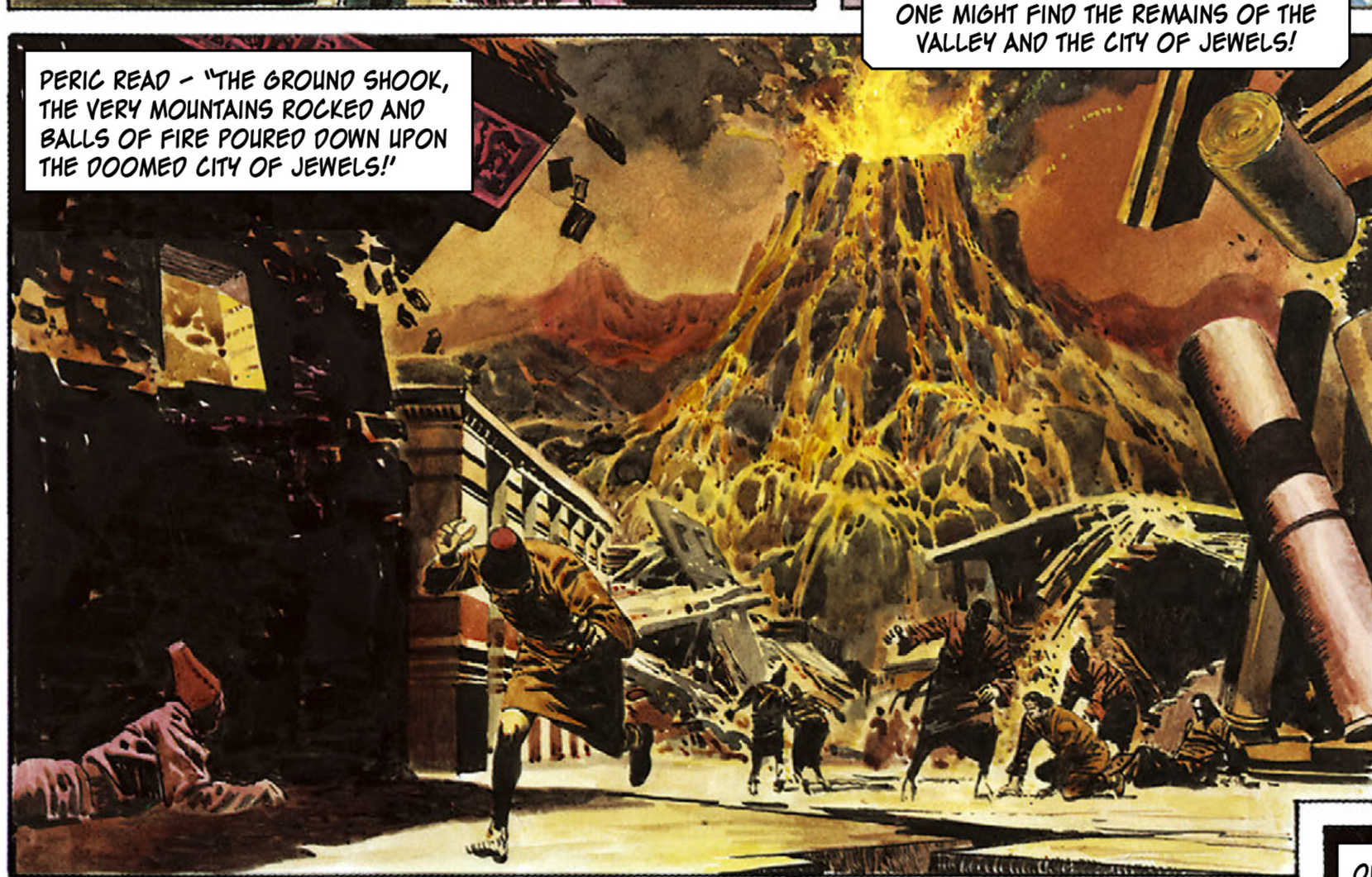
"YOU MUST IMAGINE A PEOPLE RULED OVER BY A REMARKABLE CASTE OF WARRIOR-PRIESTS, DOMINATED BY THEIR YOUTH AND STRENGTH, AND BY THEIR FANTASTIC SECRET!"


WHAT FANTASTIC SECRET?
THE WARRIOR-PRIESTS APPEAR TO HAVE DISCOVERED THE KEY TO ETERNAL YOUTH AND STRENGTH!

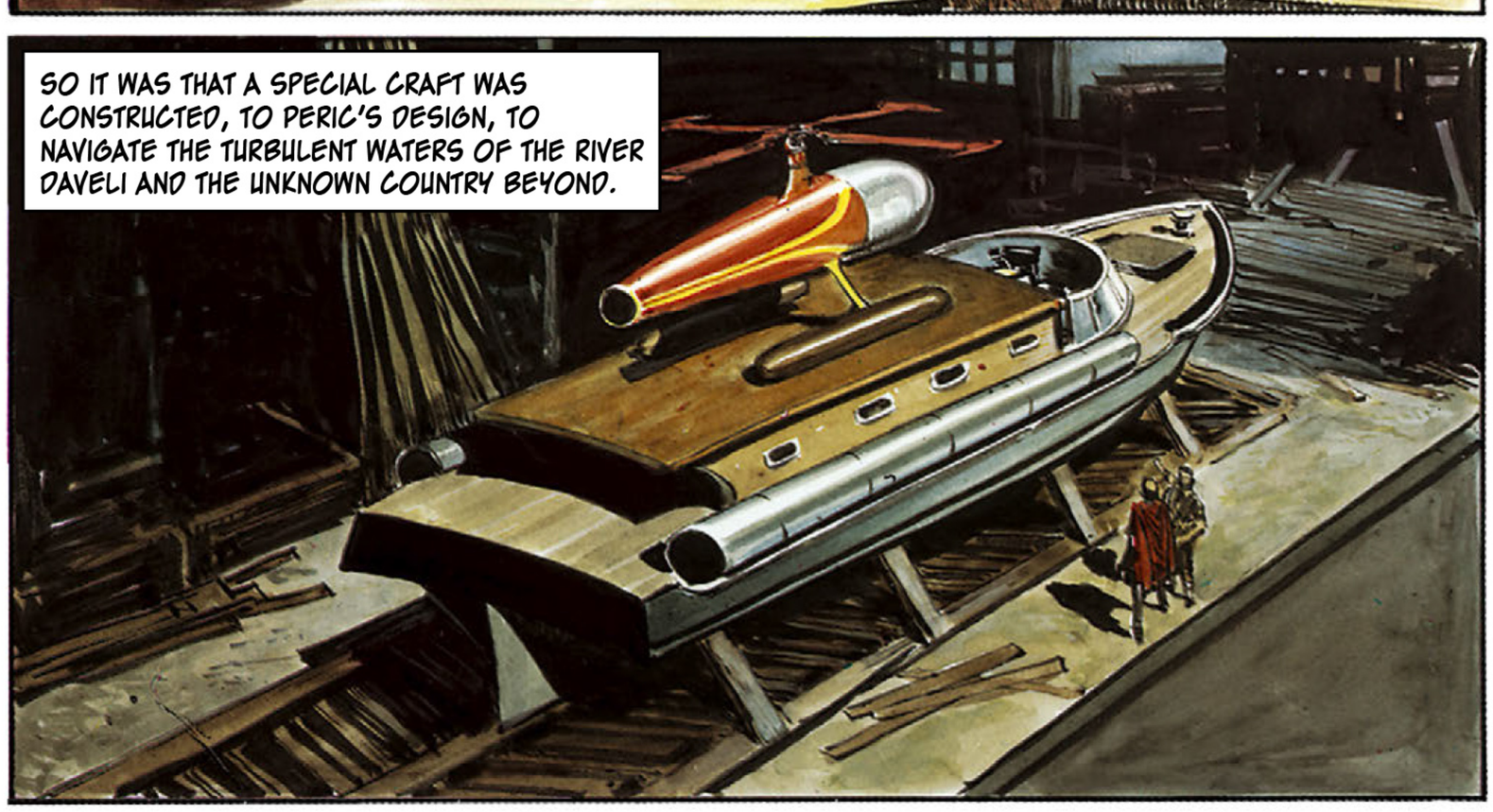
THE EMPEROR TRIGO GLANCED TOWARDS A GLOBE OF ELEKTON.
WHERE – IF THE STORY IS NOT A MYTH – MIGHT THE VALLEY OF CONQUERORS HAVE EXISTED?
I CALCULATE ABOUT *HERE*, IMPERIAL MAJESTY...


NEAR THE EQUATOR, BEYOND THE JUNGLE OF DAVELI, IS A VAST MOUNTAIN RANGE THAT HAS NEVER BEEN EXPLORED. SOMEWHERE AMONG THOSE MOUNTAINS ONE MIGHT FIND THE REMAINS OF THE VALLEY AND THE CITY OF JEWELS!

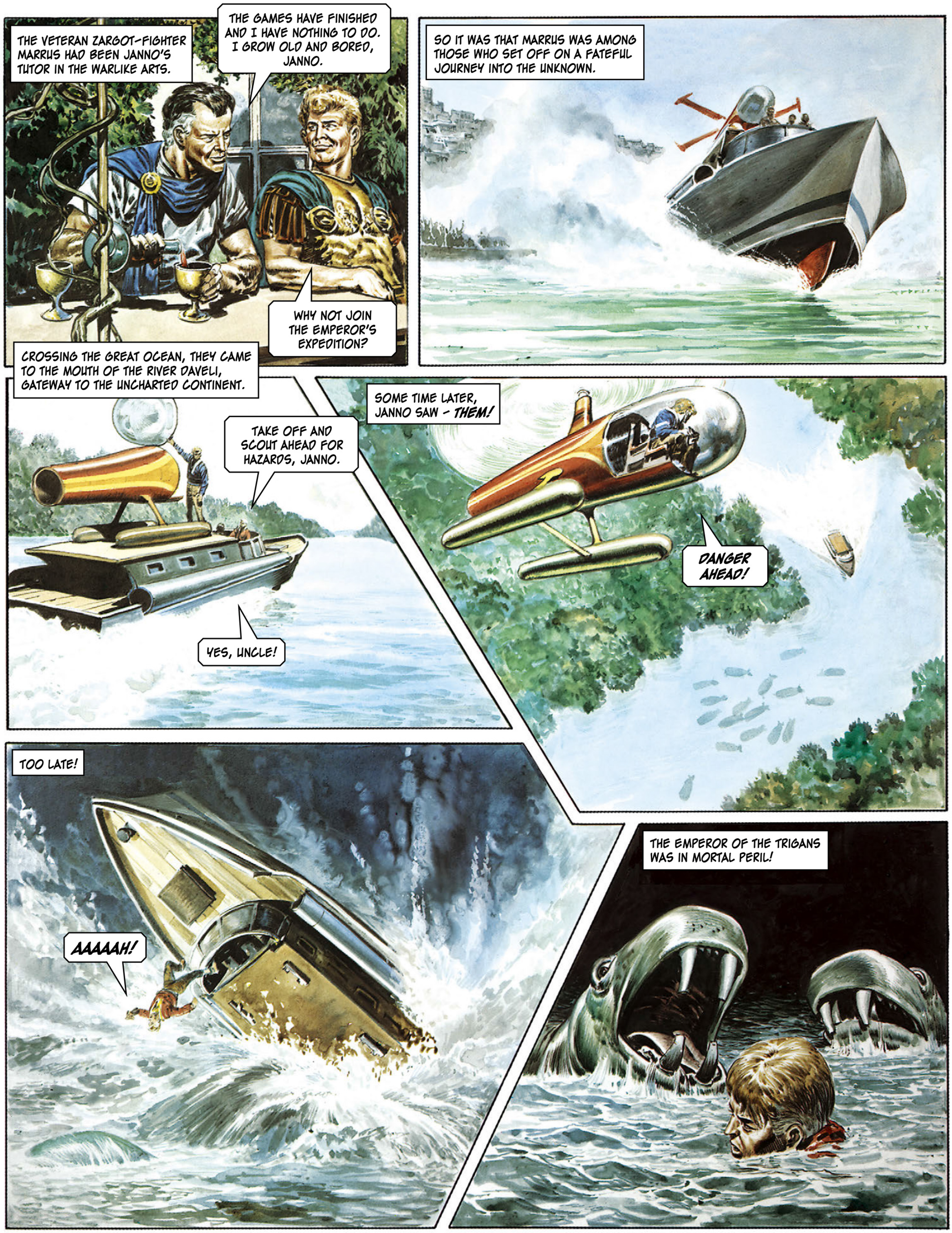
WHAT HAPPENED TO THESE PEOPLE WHOSE LEADERS WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE DISCOVERED THE KEY TO ETERNAL YOUTH?
ACCORDING TO THE PAPERS, THERE WAS A DISASTER – A MONSTROUS CATACLYSM. LISTEN...


PERIC READ – "THE GROUND SHOOK, THE VERY MOUNTAINS ROCKED AND BALLS OF FIRE POURED DOWN UPON THE DOOMED CITY OF JEWELS!"

PERIC, I HAVE AN URGE TO SEARCH FOR THE VALLEY OF CONQUERORS!
I DOUBT IF YOU WOULD FIND ANYTHING BUT ARCHAEOLOGICAL FRAGMENTS, BUT THEY WOULD GREATLY ADVANCE OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE EARLY INHABITANTS OF THE PLANET.


SO IT WAS THAT A SPECIAL CRAFT WAS CONSTRUCTED, TO PERIC'S DESIGN, TO NAVIGATE THE TURBULENT WATERS OF THE RIVER DAVELI AND THE UNKNOWN COUNTRY BEYOND.

ONE DAY, JANNO, THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW, WAS RIDING THROUGH THE CITY WHEN A VOICE HAILED HIM FROM A WAYSIDE INN.
HEY! JANNO!
MARRUS, OLD FRIEND!

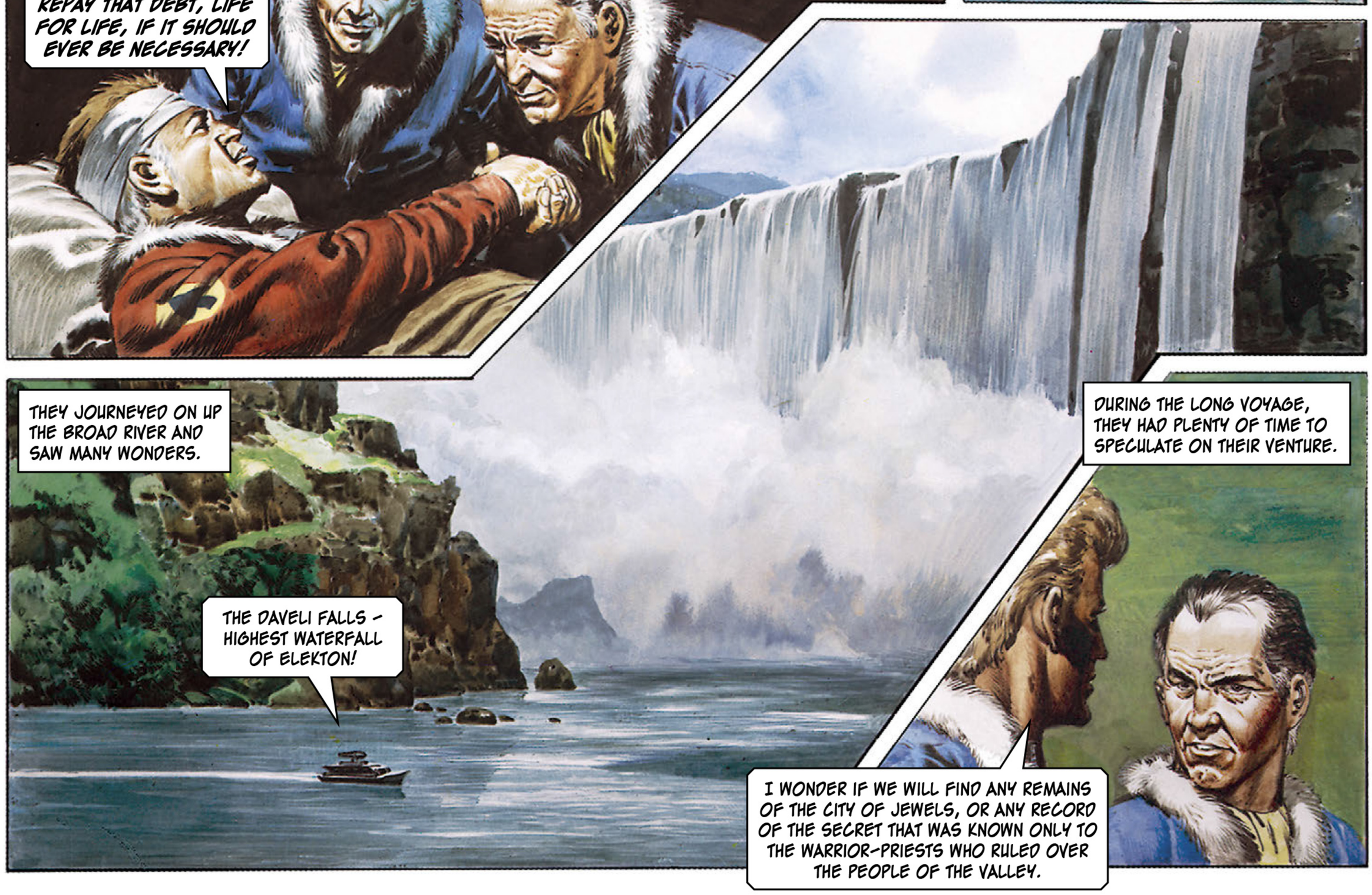

THE VETERAN ZARGOT-FIGHTER MARRUS HAD BEEN JANNO'S TUTOR IN THE WARLIKE ARTS.
THE GAMES HAVE FINISHED AND I HAVE NOTHING TO DO. I GROW OLD AND BORED, JANNO.
WHY NOT JOIN THE EMPEROR'S EXPEDITION?
SO IT WAS THAT MARRUS WAS AMONG THOSE WHO SET OFF ON A FATEFUL JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN.
CROSSING THE GREAT OCEAN, THEY CAME TO THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER DAVELI, GATEWAY TO THE UNCHARTED CONTINENT.
TAKE OFF AND SCOUT AHEAD FOR HAZARDS, JANNO.
YES, UNCLE!
SOME TIME LATER, JANNO SAW – THEM!
DANGER AHEAD!
TOO LATE!
AAAAAH!
THE EMPEROR OF THE TRIGANS WAS IN MORTAL PERIL!

THE BEASTS CLOSED IN UPON THE HELPLESS MAN AND TOSSED HIM HIGH IN THE AIR LIKE A BROKEN DOLL.

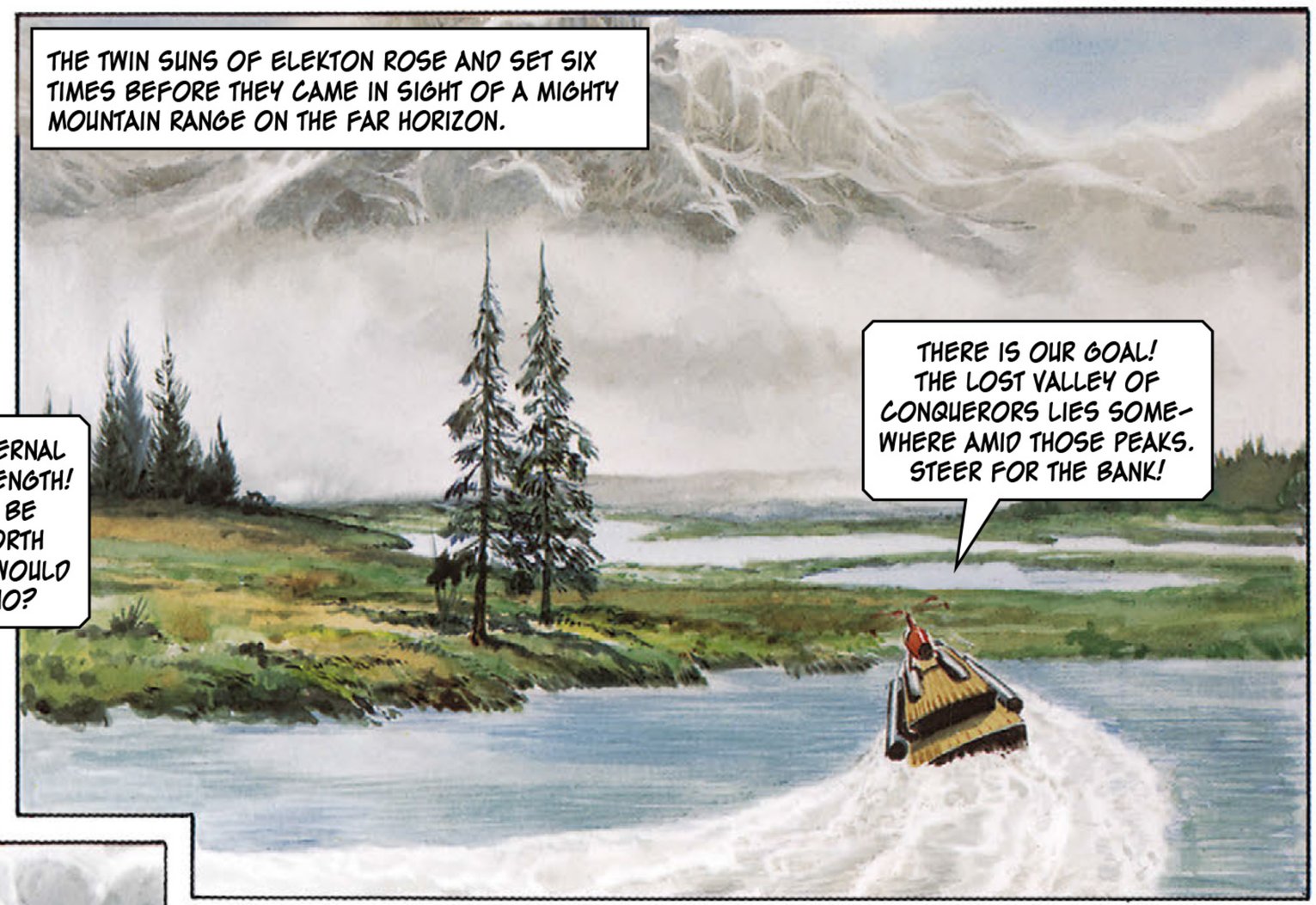
IN COMPLETE DISREGARD FOR HIS OWN LIFE, THE ZARGOT-FIGHTER MARRUS PLUNGED TO THE EMPEROR'S AID. HE WOUND ONE MUSCULAR ARM ABOUT THE UNCONSCIOUS FORM.
JANNO!

HE SEIZED A HANDHOLD ON JANNO'S CRAFT...

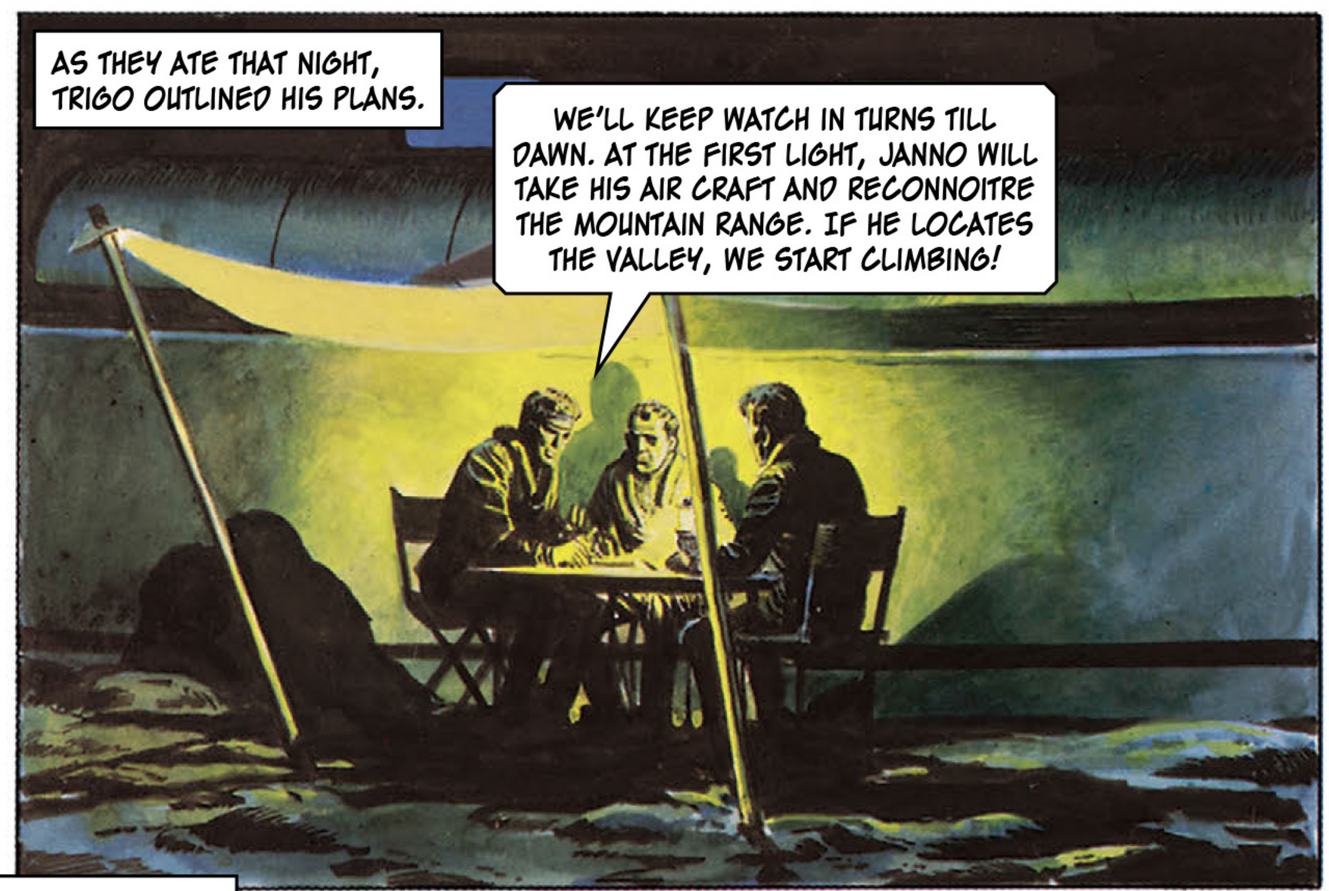
SOON, TRIGO WAS RECOVERING IN THE PARENT CRAFT. HE CLASPED THE HAND OF HIS RESCUER.
YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE FOR MINE, MARRUS, AND THIS I SWEAR - I WILL REPAY THAT DEBT, LIFE FOR LIFE, IF IT SHOULD EVER BE NECESSARY!


THEY JOURNEYED ON UP THE BROAD RIVER AND SAW MANY WONDERS.
THE DAVELI FALLS - HIGHEST WATERFALL OF ELEKTON!
DURING THE LONG VOYAGE, THEY HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO SPECULATE ON THEIR VENTURE.
I WONDER IF WE WILL FIND ANY REMAINS OF THE CITY OF JEWELS, OR ANY RECORD OF THE SECRET THAT WAS KNOWN ONLY TO THE WARRIOR-PRIESTS WHO RULED OVER THE PEOPLE OF THE VALLEY.

MARRUS SPOKE FEELINGLY.
THE KEY TO ETERNAL YOUTH AND STRENGTH! THAT WOULD BE A SECRET WORTH POSSESSING, WOULD IT NOT, JANNO?


THE TWIN SUNS OF ELEKTON ROSE AND SET SIX TIMES BEFORE THEY CAME IN SIGHT OF A MIGHTY MOUNTAIN RANGE ON THE FAR HORIZON.
THERE IS OUR GOAL! THE LOST VALLEY OF CONQUERORS LIES SOME-WHERE AMID THOSE PEAKS. STEER FOR THE BANK!

IT GREW DARK AS THEY DREW NEAR THE FOOTHILLS.
WE'LL MAKE CAMP HERE.


AS THEY ATE THAT NIGHT, TRIGO OUTLINED HIS PLANS.
WE'LL KEEP WATCH IN TURNS TILL DAWN. AT THE FIRST LIGHT, JANNO WILL TAKE HIS AIR CRAFT AND RECONNOITRE THE MOUNTAIN RANGE. IF HE LOCATES THE VALLEY, WE START CLIMBING!

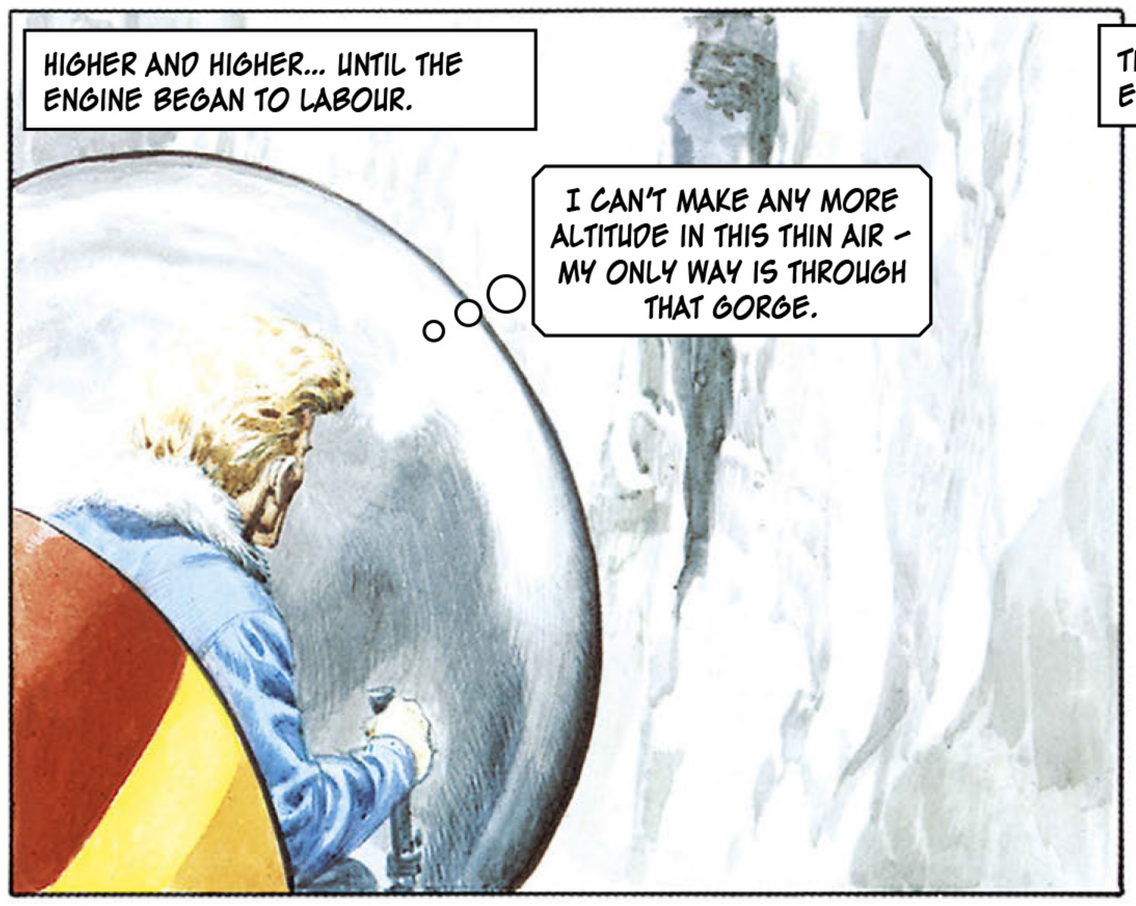
MARRUS KEPT THE FIRST WATCH.

SUDDENLY HE GAVE A START, AS HE FELT A TINY STAB OF PAIN LIKE AN INSECT BITE. NEXT INSTANT, HE PITCHED FORWARD ON HIS FACE!

IN THE EARLY HOURS, TRIGO WAS RUDELY AWAKENED BY HIS NEPHEW.
UNCLE! UNCLE! MARRUS HAS GONE! VANISHED!

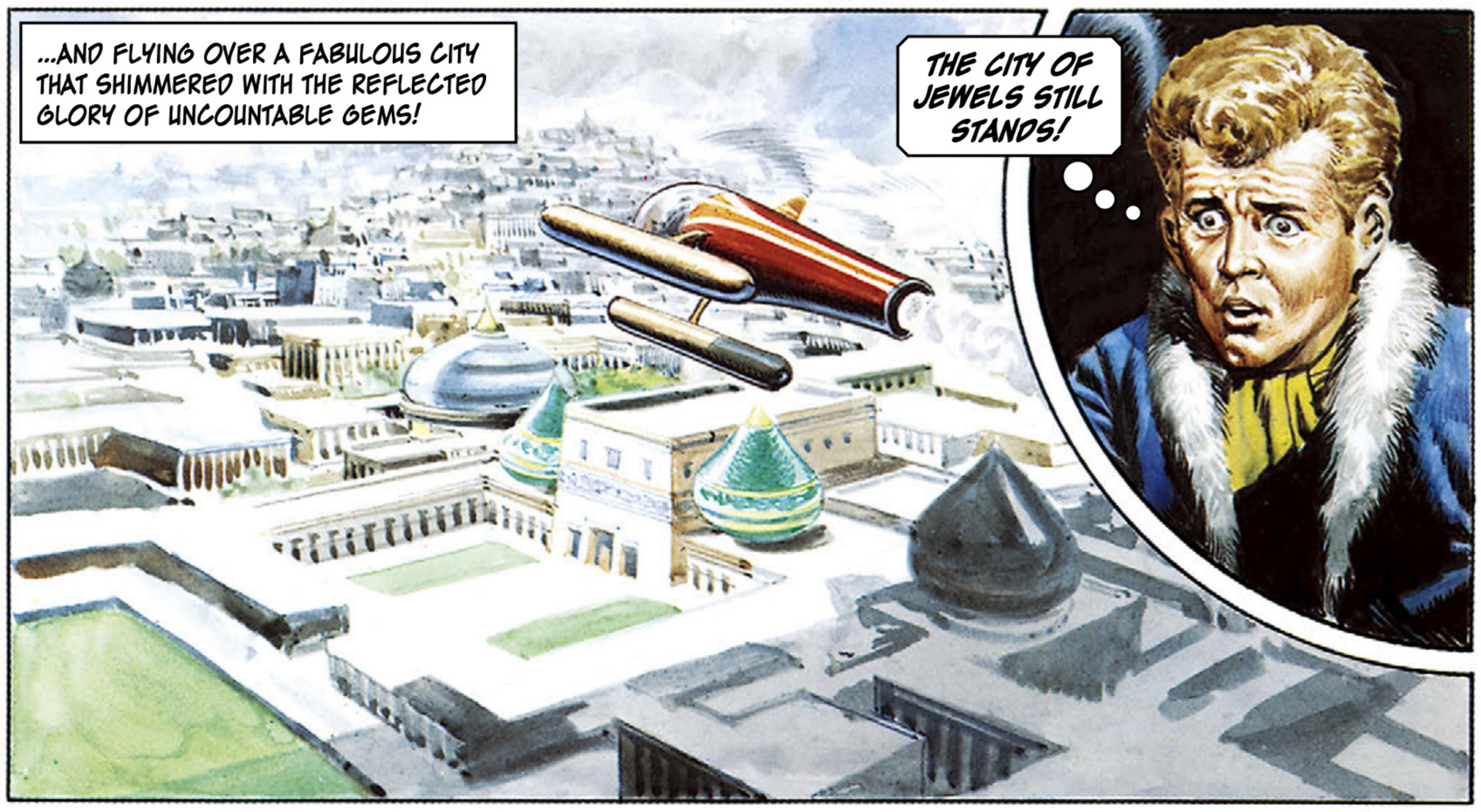
THEY SEARCHED TILL ELEKTON'S TWIN SUNS APPEARED ABOVE THE HORIZON.
NO SIGN OF HIM! TAKE OFF AND SCOUR THE MOUNTAINS, JANNO.
YES, UNCLE!

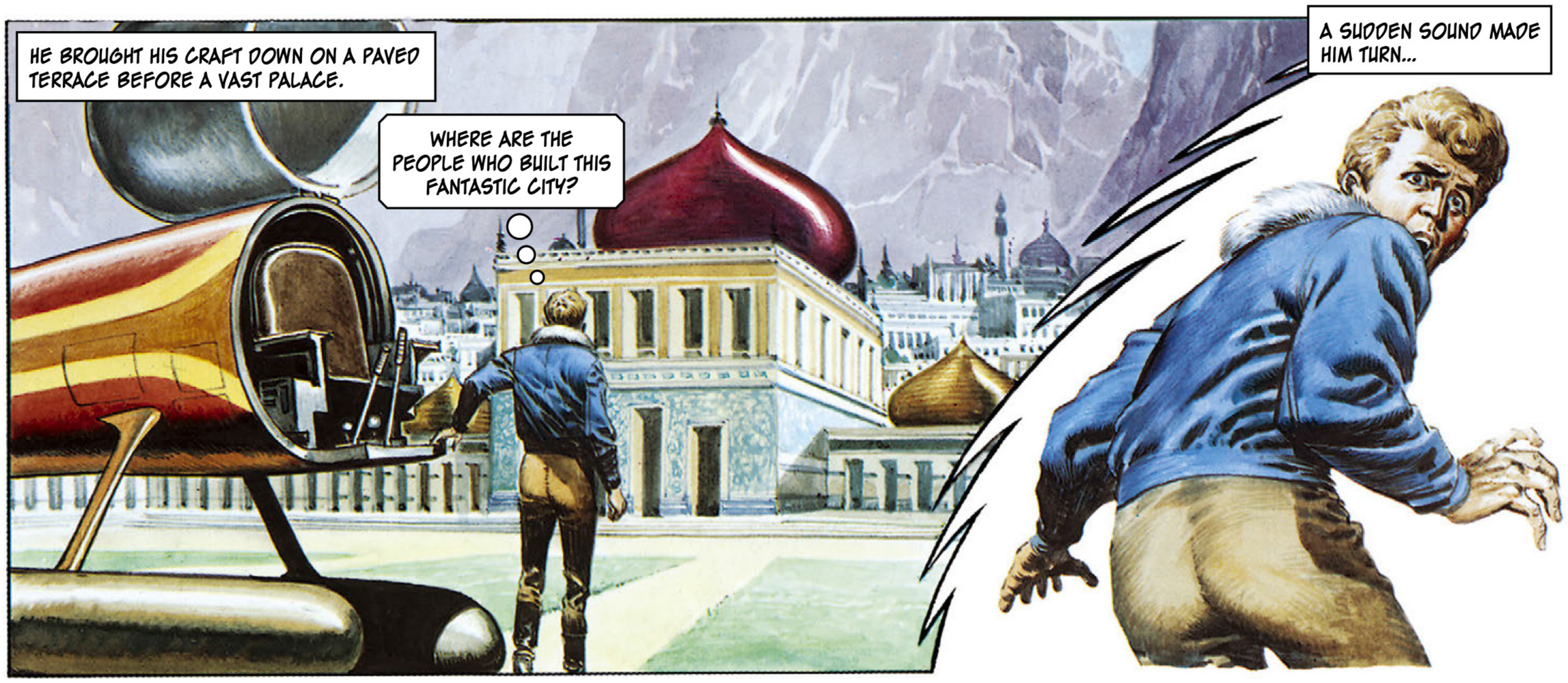
JANNO SENT HIS CRAFT SOARING UP THE STEEP MOUNTAIN WALL.
WHAT CAN HAVE HAPPENED TO MARRUS?


HIGHER AND HIGHER... UNTIL THE ENGINE BEGAN TO LABOUR.
I CAN'T MAKE ANY MORE ALTITUDE IN THIS THIN AIR – MY ONLY WAY IS THROUGH THAT GORGE.

THE GORGE SEEMED ENDLESS.
IT'S GETTING NARROWER – I'D BETTER TURN BACK.

SUDDENLY HE WAS OUT IN A BROAD VALLEY...
BY ALL THE STARS!


...AND FLYING OVER A FABULOUS CITY THAT SHIMMERED WITH THE REFLECTED GLORY OF UNCOUNTABLE GEMS!
THE CITY OF JEWELS STILL STANDS!

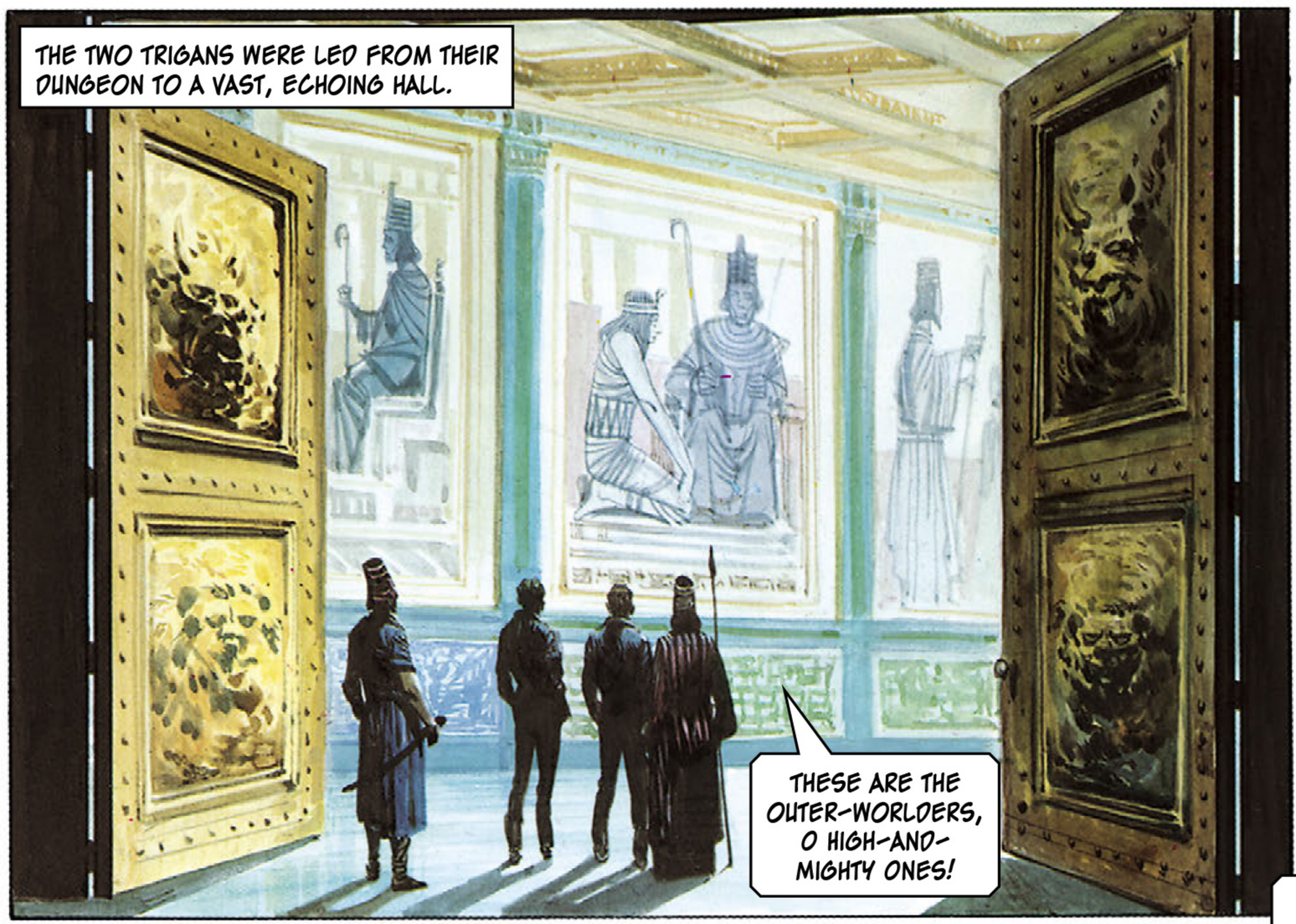

HE BROUGHT HIS CRAFT DOWN ON A PAVED TERRACE BEFORE A VAST PALACE.
WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO BUILT THIS FANTASTIC CITY?
A SUDDEN SOUND MADE HIM TURN...

THE DART KNOCKED HIM UNCONSCIOUS.
TAKE HIM TO JOIN THE OTHER OUT-WORLDER! I WILL BEAR THE NEWS TO THE HIGH-AND-MIGHTY ONES!

JANNO RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS, TO FIND HIMSELF MANACLED NEXT TO MARRUS.
JANNO! CAN YOU HEAR ME, JANNO? WE'RE IN THE SECRET VALLEY!

THERE WAS NO FEAR IN THE ZARGOT-FIGHTER'S VOICE - ONLY EXULTATION.
THINK OF IT, JANNO - SOON WE MAY BE FACE TO FACE WITH THE RULERS OF THIS VALLEY - THE ONES WHO HOLD THE SECRET OF ETERNAL YOUTH!

AND THEN...
THEY ARE TO BE TAKEN BEFORE THE HIGH-AND-MIGHTY ONES.

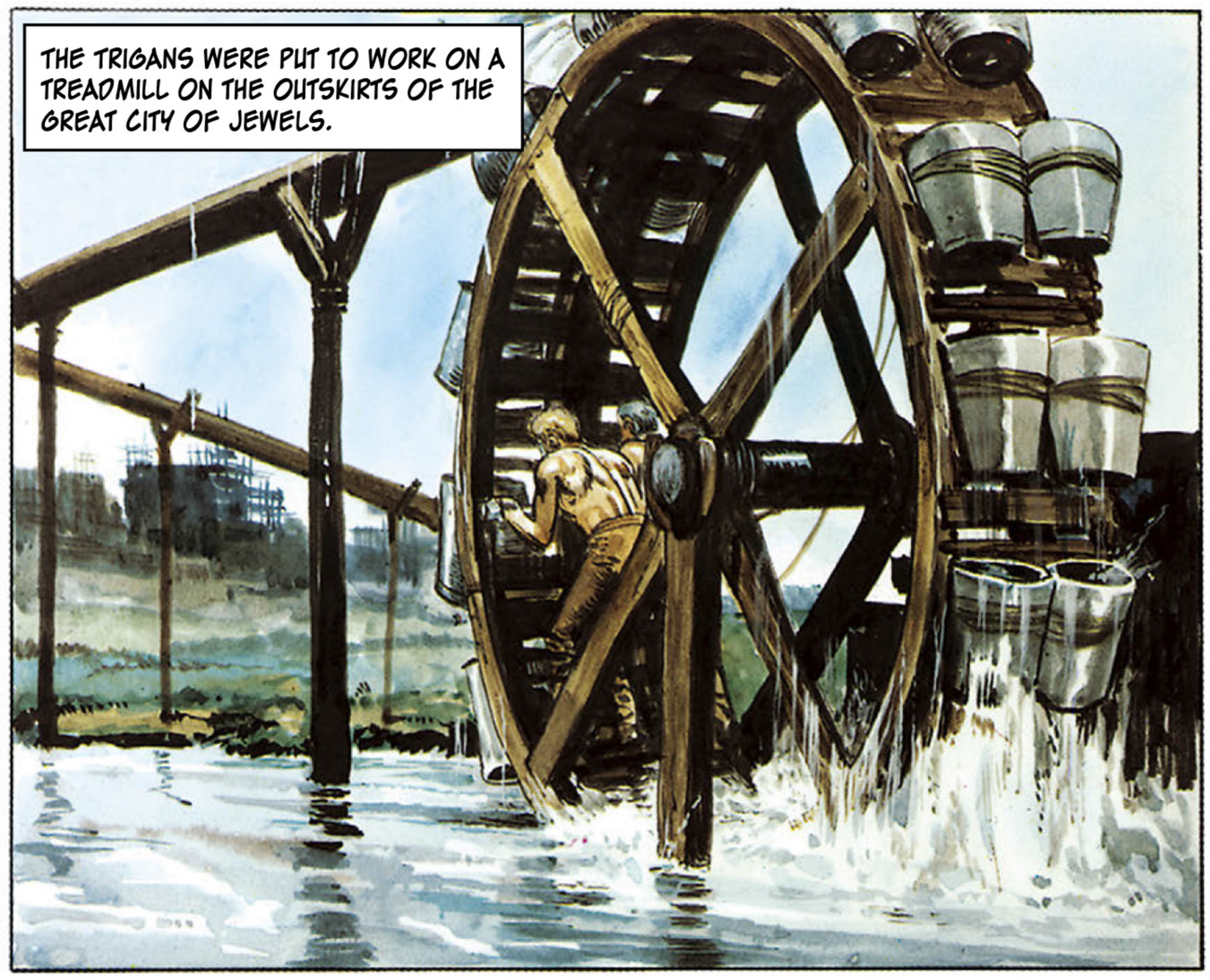

THE TWO TRIGANS WERE LED FROM THEIR DUNGEON TO A VAST, ECHOING HALL.
THESE ARE THE OUTER-WORLDERS, O HIGH-AND-MIGHTY ONES!

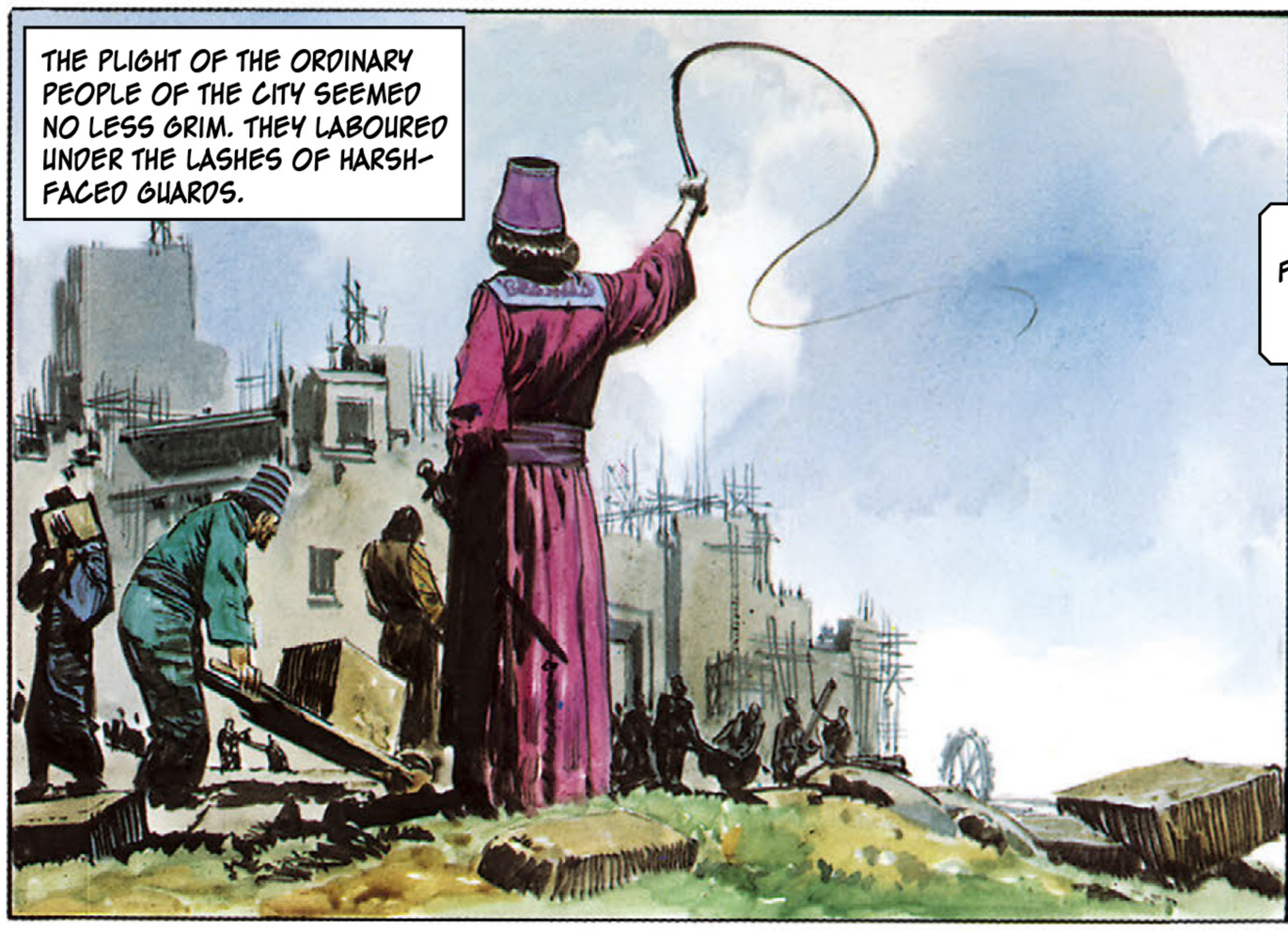
THERE WAS A MOMENT OF SILENCE, BROKEN BY MARRUS'S AWESTRUCK WHISPER.
THE WARRIOR-PRIESTS! THE MEN WITH THE KEY TO ETERNAL YOUTH AND STRENGTH!

THE STRANGE RULERS GAZED DOWN ON THEM.
WHO ARE YOU, AND FROM WHENCE DO YOU COME? SPEAK!

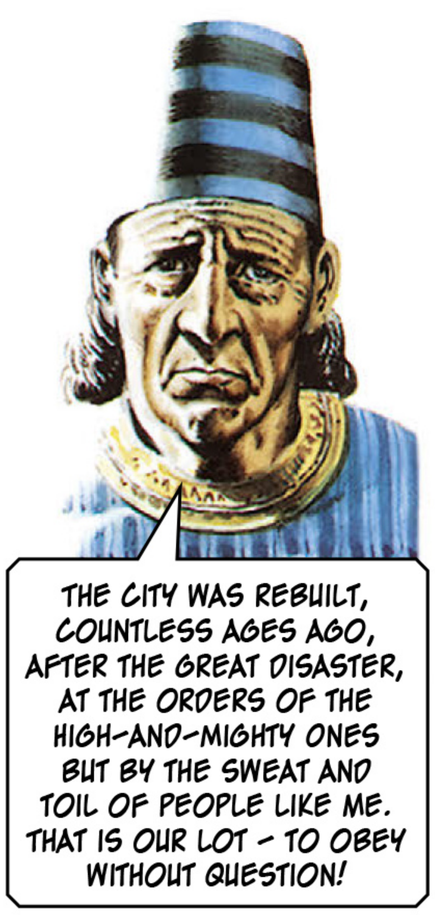
JANNO'S REPLY WAS PROUD.
I AM LORD JANNO - NEPHEW OF TRIGO, EMPEROR OF ALL THE TRIGANS. WE COME IN PEACE, ON A SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION.

NO OUTER-WORLDER CITIZEN WHO ENTERS THE VALLEY OF CONQUERORS EVER LEAVES IT! YOU WILL REMAIN HERE TO LABOUR FOR THE REST OF YOUR DAYS.


THE TRIGANS WERE PUT TO WORK ON A TREADMILL ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE GREAT CITY OF JEWELS.


THE PLIGHT OF THE ORDINARY PEOPLE OF THE CITY SEEMED NO LESS GRIM. THEY LABOURED UNDER THE LASHES OF HARSH-FACED GUARDS.

AT THE HEIGHT OF THE NOONDAY SUNS, ONE OF THE LABOURERS BROUGHT A DRINK TO EASE THEIR PARCHED THROATS.
DRINK, FOOLS! FOR FOOLS YOU MUST SURELY BE, TO COME HERE OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL!
WE THOUGHT THERE WOULD ONLY BE THE RUINS OF A LONG-GONE CITY.

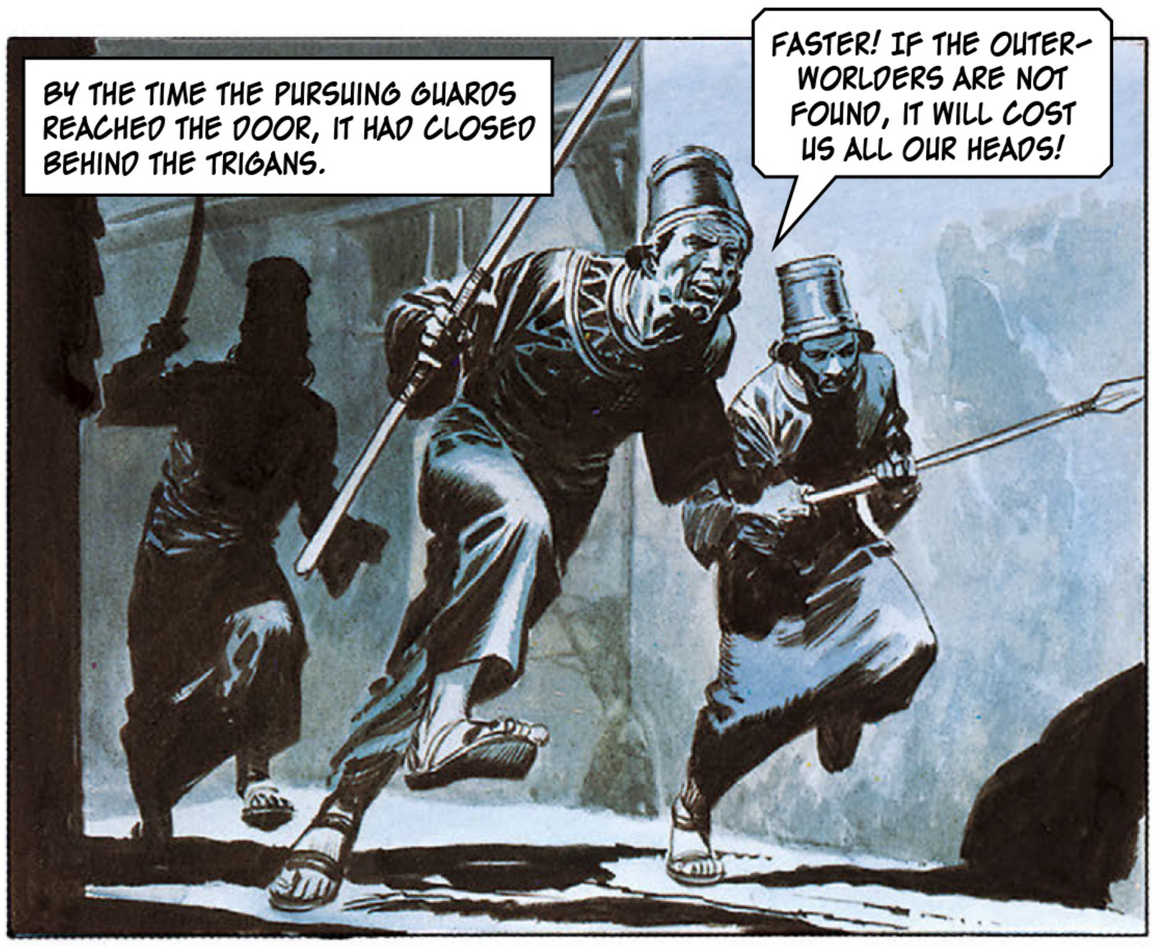

THE CITY WAS REBUILT, COUNTLESS AGES AGO, AFTER THE GREAT DISASTER, AT THE ORDERS OF THE HIGH-AND-MIGHTY ONES BUT BY THE SWEAT AND TOIL OF PEOPLE LIKE ME. THAT IS OUR LOT - TO OBEY WITHOUT QUESTION!

JANNO AND MARRUS TOILED ALL DAY. WHEN NIGHT FELL, THEY SLEPT IN THEIR CHAINS. BUT HELP WAS AT HAND...

SOMEONE SHOOK JANNO AWAKE AND HE SAW A FAMILIAR FACE IN THE MOONLIGHT.
UNCLE! BUT HOW?
WE SCALED THE MOUNTAIN WALL AND CAME AFTER YOU.

MOMENTS LATER, THEY WERE FREE. BUT AS THE FIVE TRIGANS CREPT ACROSS THE CITY, THEY WERE CHALLENGED!
HALT!
RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!

DOWN A DARK ALLEYWAY THEY RACED, THEIR PURSUERS BEHIND. THEN, A DOOR OPENED...
THIS WAY!


BY THE TIME THE PURSUING GUARDS REACHED THE DOOR, IT HAD CLOSED BEHIND THE TRIGANS.
FASTER! IF THE OUTER-WORLDERS ARE NOT FOUND, IT WILL COST US ALL OUR HEADS!

MEANWHILE, TRIGO AND HIS MEN WERE FOLLOWING THEIR RESCUER DOWN SOME STEPS.
DON. LAWRENCE

THEY CAME TO A ROCK-HEWN CHAMBER CROWDED WITH WATCHFUL MEN.
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE, JANNO?
THEY LOOK LIKE THE COMMON FOLK OF THE CITY, UNCLE. FROM WHAT I'VE LEARNED, THEY ARE HIDEOUSLY OPPRESSED BY THEIR LEADERS.

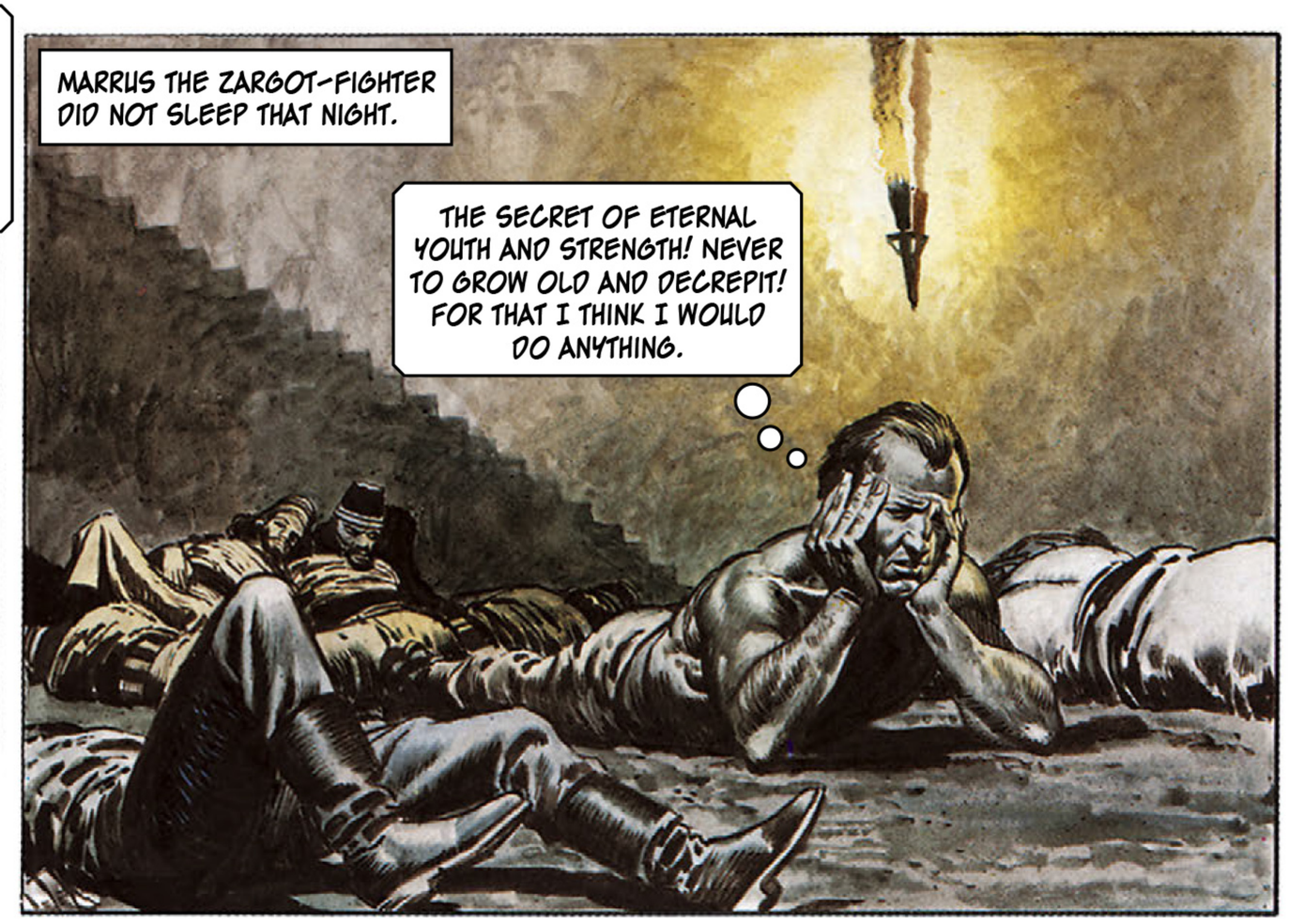
THE NEWCOMERS WERE GREETED QUIETLY.
WE WELCOME YOU AMONGST US, OUTER-WORLDERS. THE HIGH-AND-MIGHTY ONES WILL CONDEMN YOU TO DEATH FOR THIS, BUT WE WILL HIDE YOU.
THEN - YOU ARE REBELS?

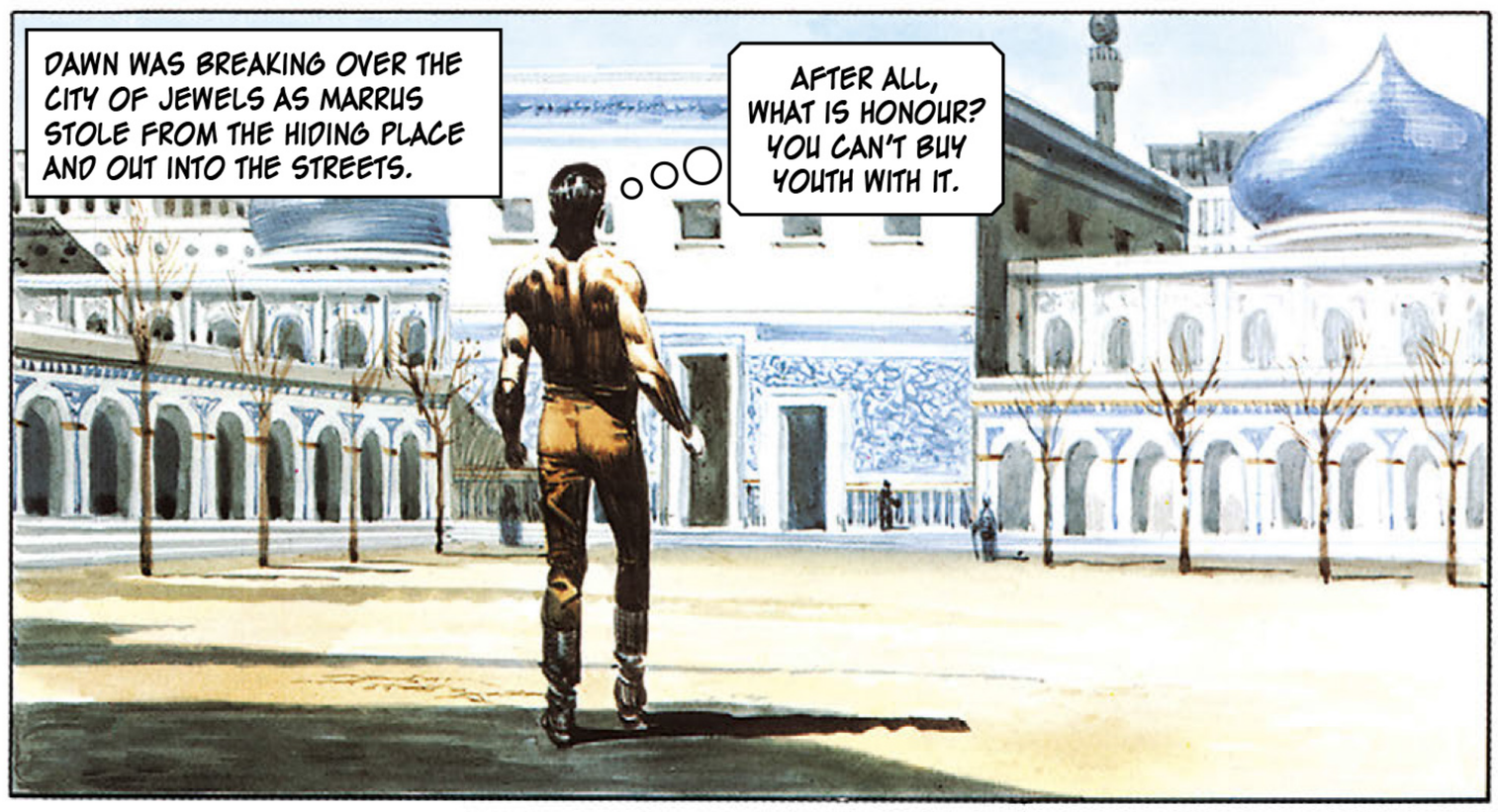
FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, OUR PEOPLE HAVE MET IN SECRET TO DISCUSS REBELLION AGAINST THE HIGH-AND-MIGHTY ONES AND THE WARRIOR CASTE WHO ENFORCE THEIR RULE. WE SPEAK AND DREAM OF FREEDOM - BUT WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

TRIGO'S BLADE FLASHED IN THE TORCHLIGHT.
DO? YOU MUST GO OUT INTO THE SUNLIGHT AND *FIGHT* FOR YOUR FREEDOM!

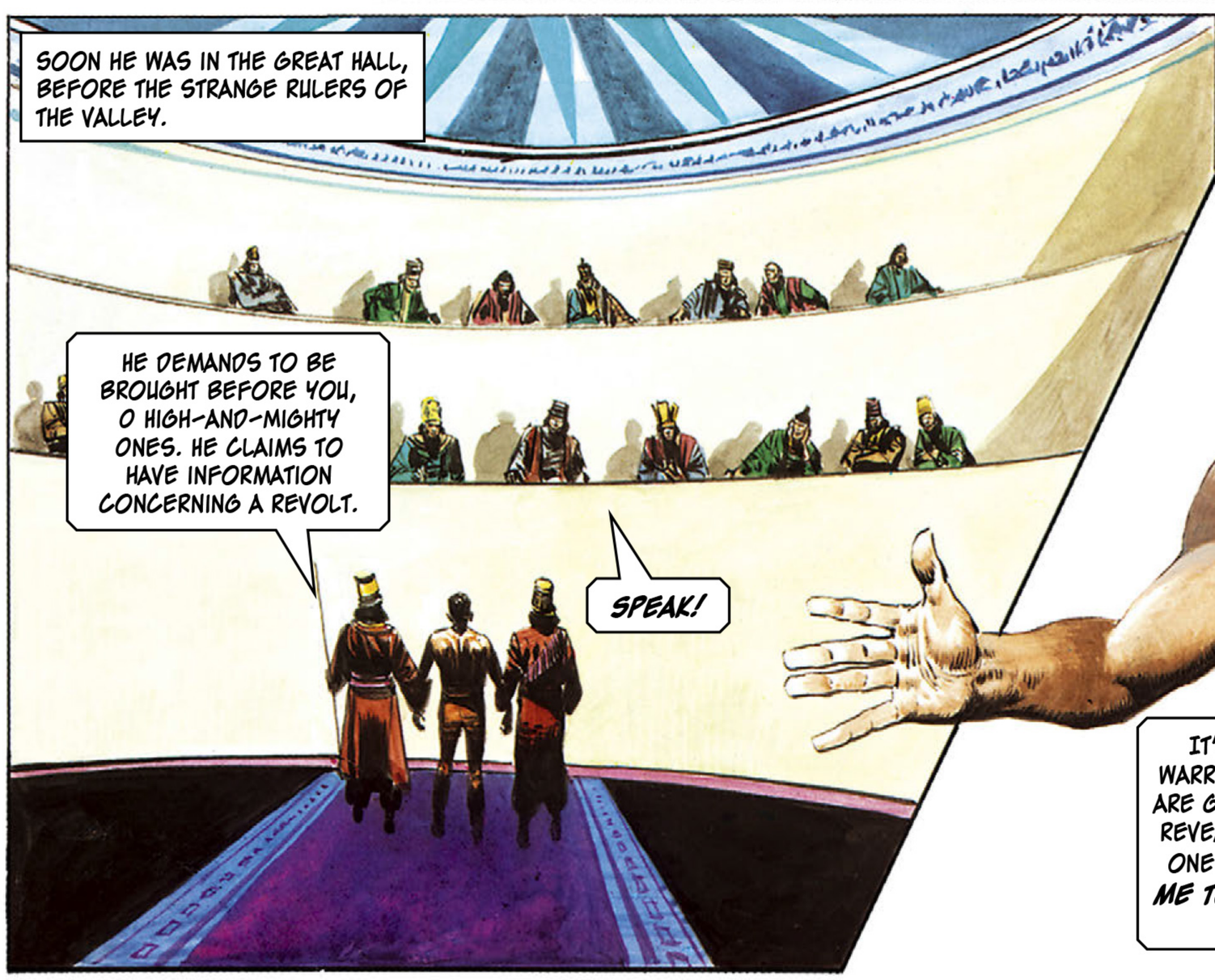
THAT SPEECH SET THE REBELS' SPIRITS AFLAME.
GIVE US YOUR ORDERS, OUTER-WORLDER! WE WILL FOLLOW YOU TO THE DEATH!
A LEADER AT LAST!

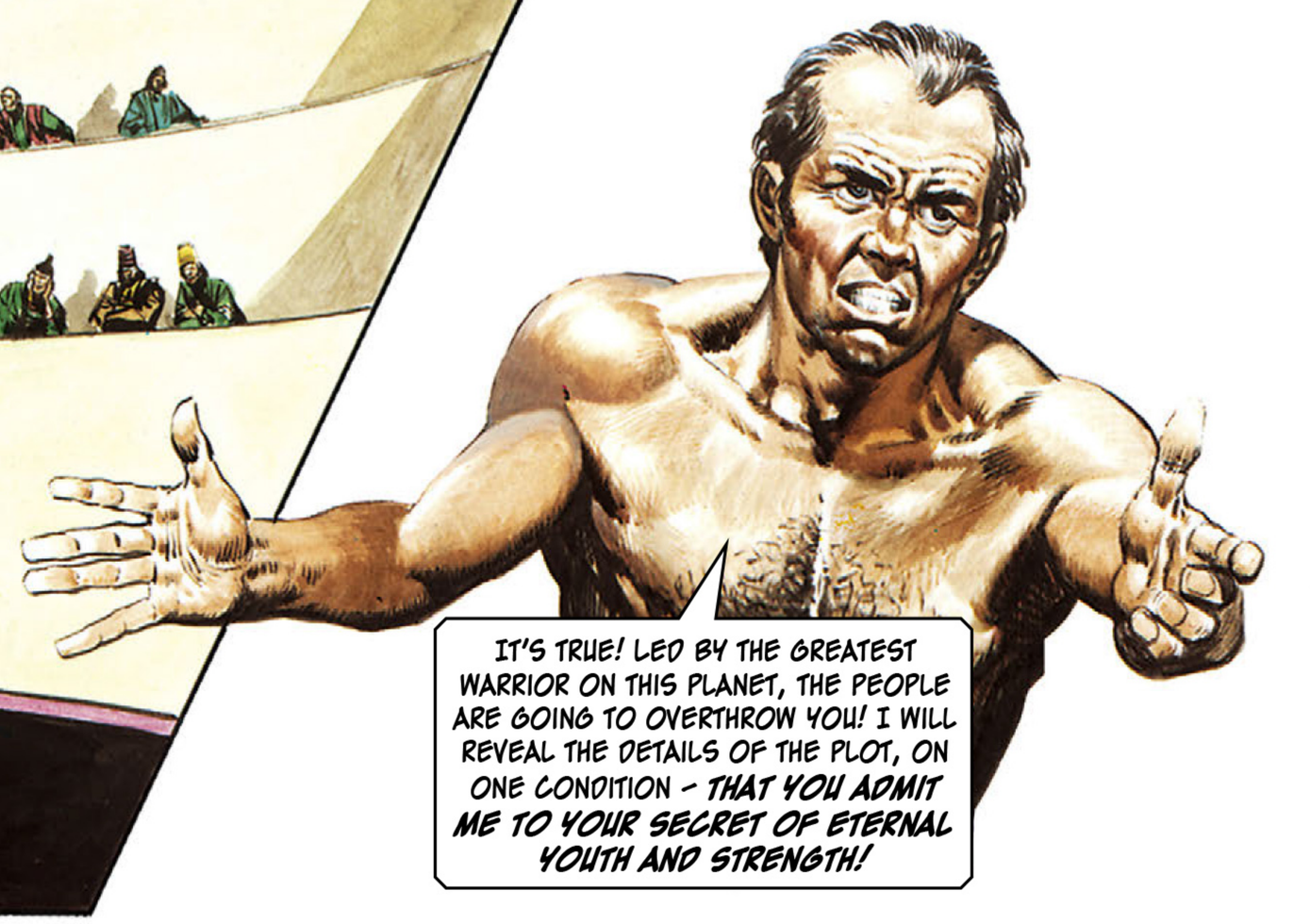
TRIGO HELD A COUNCIL-OF-WAR.
TOMORROW IS THE LONGEST DAY OF THE SOLAR YEAR AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH CUSTOM, ALL CITIZENS MUST GATHER AT THE TEMPLE OF THE FLAME, WHERE THE HIGH-AND-MIGHTY ONES PERFORM THEIR MYSTICAL RITES.
THEN WE STRIKE A BLOW FOR FREEDOM TOMORROW – AT THE TEMPLE OF THE FLAME!


MARRUS THE ZARGOT-FIGHTER DID NOT SLEEP THAT NIGHT.
THE SECRET OF ETERNAL YOUTH AND STRENGTH! NEVER TO GROW OLD AND DECREPIT! FOR THAT I THINK I WOULD DO ANYTHING.


DAWN WAS BREAKING OVER THE CITY OF JEWELS AS MARRUS STOLE FROM THE HIDING PLACE AND OUT INTO THE STREETS.
AFTER ALL, WHAT IS HONOUR? YOU CAN'T BUY YOUTH WITH IT.

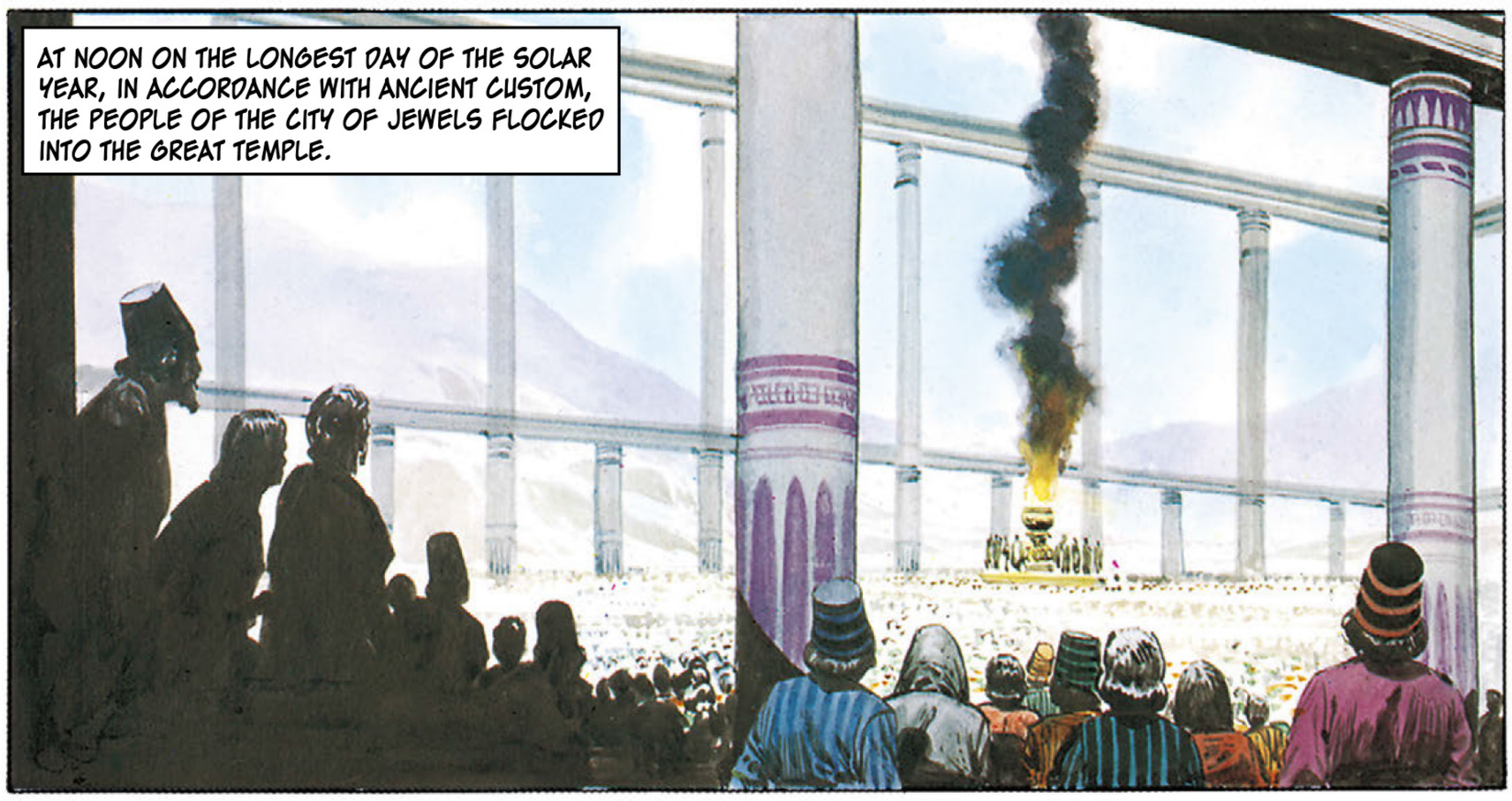
HE WAS QUICKLY SEEN AND OVERPOWERED.
IT IS ONE OF THE OUTER-WORLDERS WHO ESCAPED THE TREADMILL!

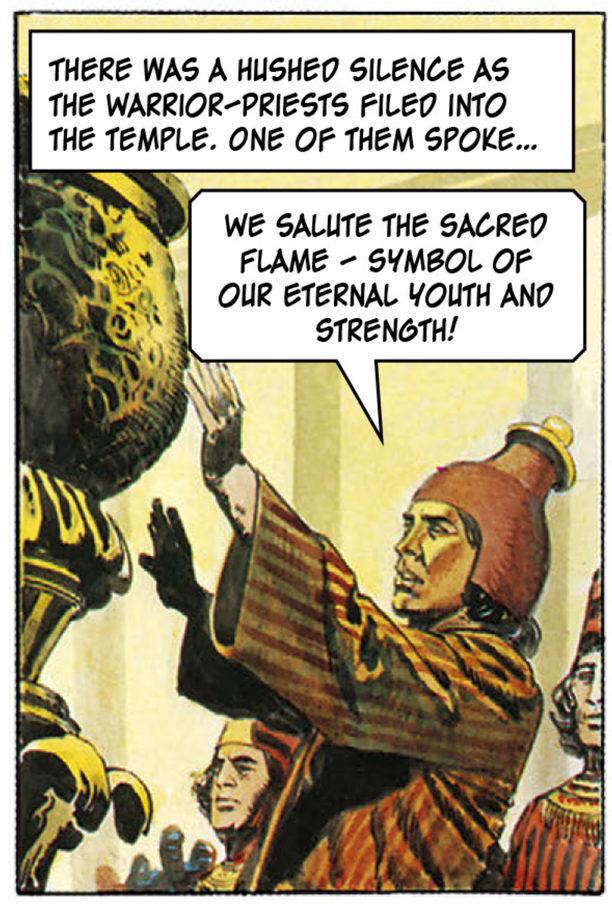

SOON HE WAS IN THE GREAT HALL, BEFORE THE STRANGE RULERS OF THE VALLEY.
HE DEMANDS TO BE BROUGHT BEFORE YOU, O HIGH-AND-MIGHTY ONES. HE CLAIMS TO HAVE INFORMATION CONCERNING A REVOLT.
SPEAK!


IT'S TRUE! LED BY THE GREATEST WARRIOR ON THIS PLANET, THE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO OVERTHROW YOU! I WILL REVEAL THE DETAILS OF THE PLOT, ON ONE CONDITION – THAT YOU ADMIT ME TO YOUR SECRET OF ETERNAL YOUTH AND STRENGTH!

AT MARRUS'S WORDS, THE YOUTHFUL FEATURES OF THE WARRIOR-PRIESTS TWISTED IN MIRTH AND THEIR MOCKING LAUGHTER ECHOED THROUGH THE VAST HALL.
HE SEEKS TO BECOME ONE OF US!
HA! HA! HA!
AND THEN...
IT SHALL BE AS YOU DESIRE! WHEN THE REVOLT IS QUELLED, YOU WILL BE ADMITTED TO OUR SECRETS!

THE REVOLT IS TO TAKE PLACE TODAY, IN THE TEMPLE OF THE FLAME. TRIGO HIMSELF WILL GIVE THE SIGNAL...


AT NOON ON THE LONGEST DAY OF THE SOLAR YEAR, IN ACCORDANCE WITH ANCIENT CUSTOM, THE PEOPLE OF THE CITY OF JEWELS FLOCKED INTO THE GREAT TEMPLE.

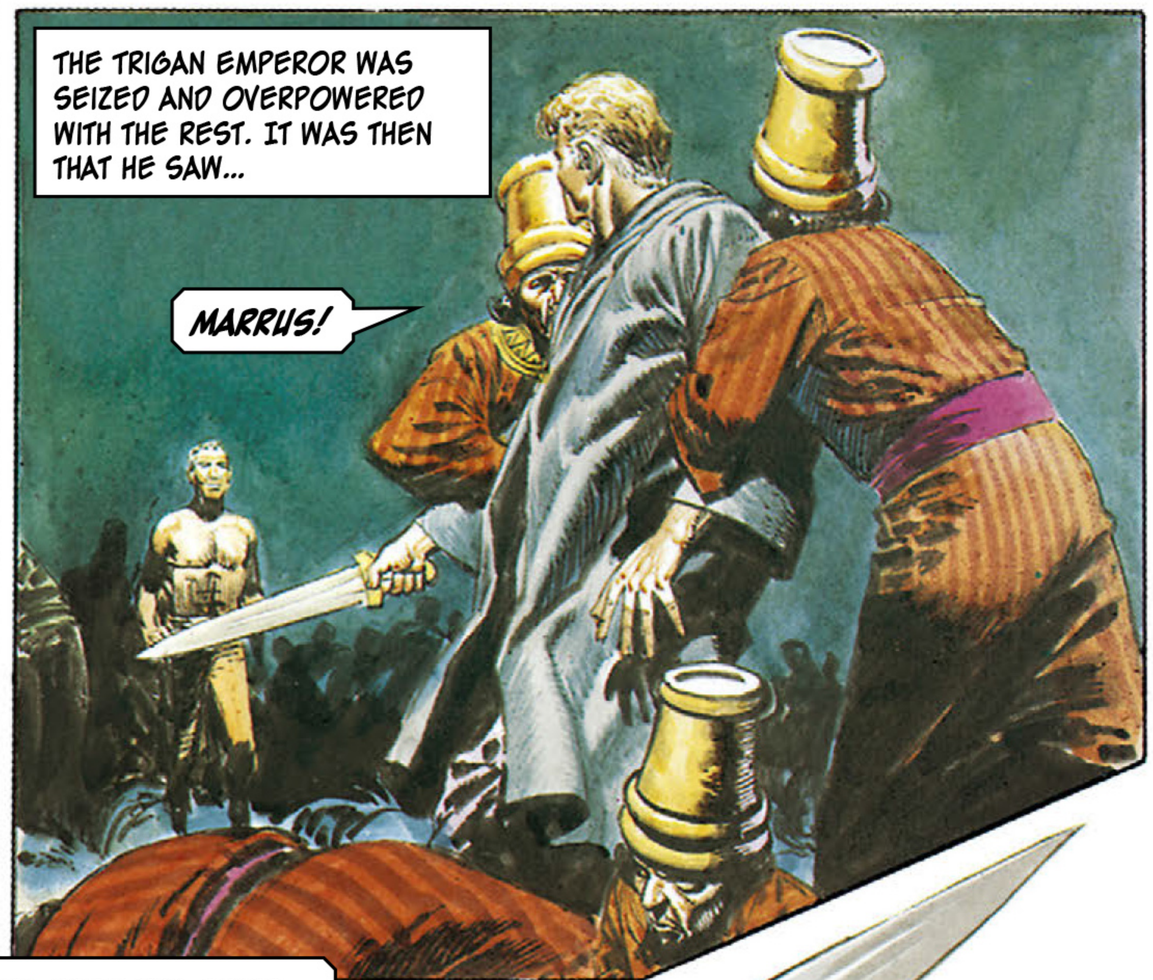

THERE WAS A HUSHED SILENCE AS THE WARRIOR-PRIESTS FILED INTO THE TEMPLE. ONE OF THEM SPOKE...
WE SALUTE THE SACRED FLAME - SYMBOL OF OUR ETERNAL YOUTH AND STRENGTH!

AND THEN - TRIGO'S VOICE RANG OUT!
ARISE, CITIZENS! - STRIKE A BLOW FOR FREEDOM!

THE COMMON PEOPLE PRODUCED HIDDEN WEAPONS AND HURLED THEMSELVES AT THE HATED GUARDS.
AAAAAGH!
EEEEEEGH!
DOWN WITH THE TYRANTS!

AN INSTANT LATER, THE NOTES OF THE TRUMPET HERALDED A SHOWER OF DESTRUCTION!

TRIGO SAW HIS FOLLOWERS FALLING ALL ABOUT HIM AND KNEW THAT THE REVOLT WAS DOOMED.
AAAAH! MY EMPEROR!
WE ARE TRAPPED!

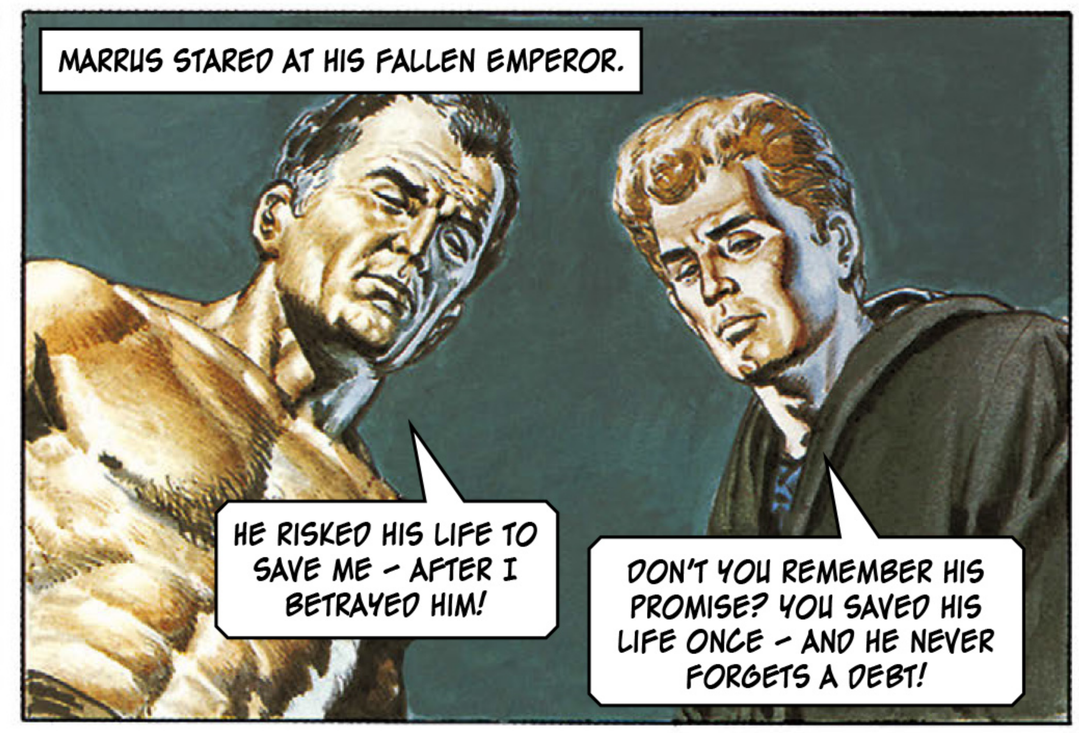

THE TRIGAN EMPEROR WAS SEIZED AND OVERPOWERED WITH THE REST. IT WAS THEN THAT HE SAW...
MARRUS!

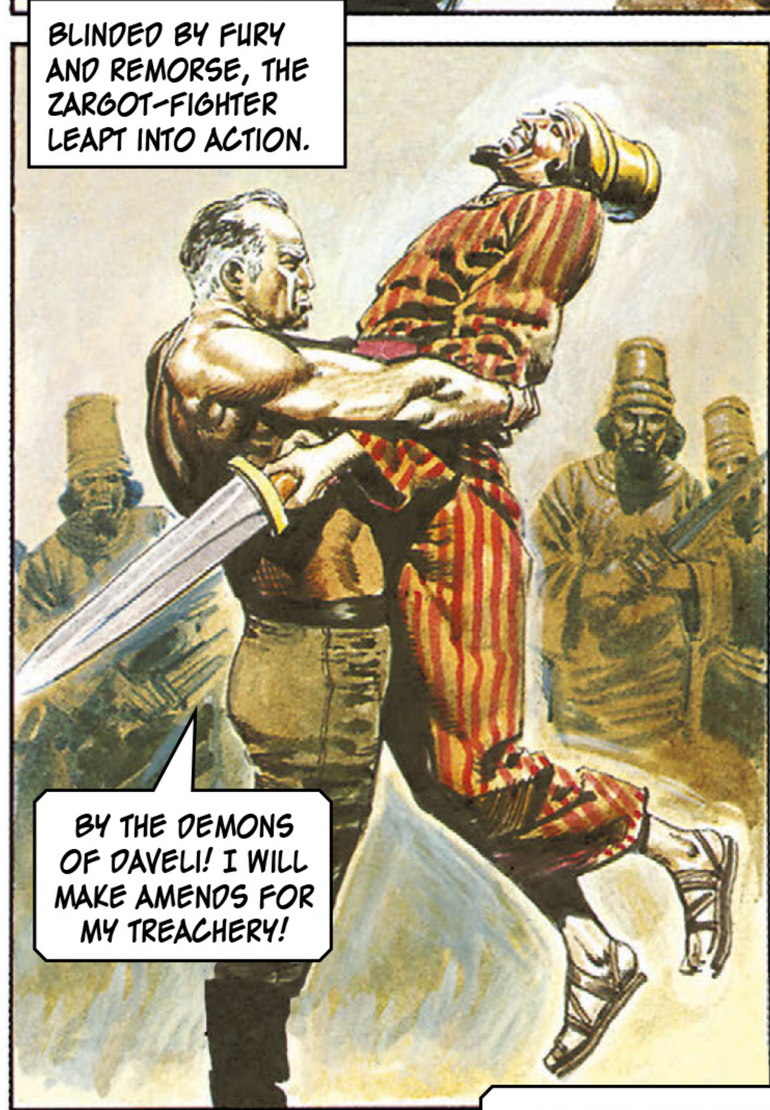
MARRUS AVOIDED THE EYES OF HIS EMPEROR!
I HAVE PLAYED MY PART – AND NOW I CLAIM MY REWARD!
YOU BETRAYED US?

THE ZARGOT-FIGHTER'S WORDS WERE GREETED WITH MERCILESS LAUGHTER.
FOOL FROM THE OUTER-WORLD! DO YOU THINK THAT YOU WOULD BE ADMITTED INTO OUR SECRETS? YOU WILL RECEIVE YOUR REWARD – A QUICK END!

CUT HIM DOWN!

AS THE SWORD HISSED TOWARDS MARRUS, TRIGO DARTED FORWARD AND DEFLECTED THE WARRIOR'S AIM. THE FLAT OF THE BLADE STRUCK HIM.

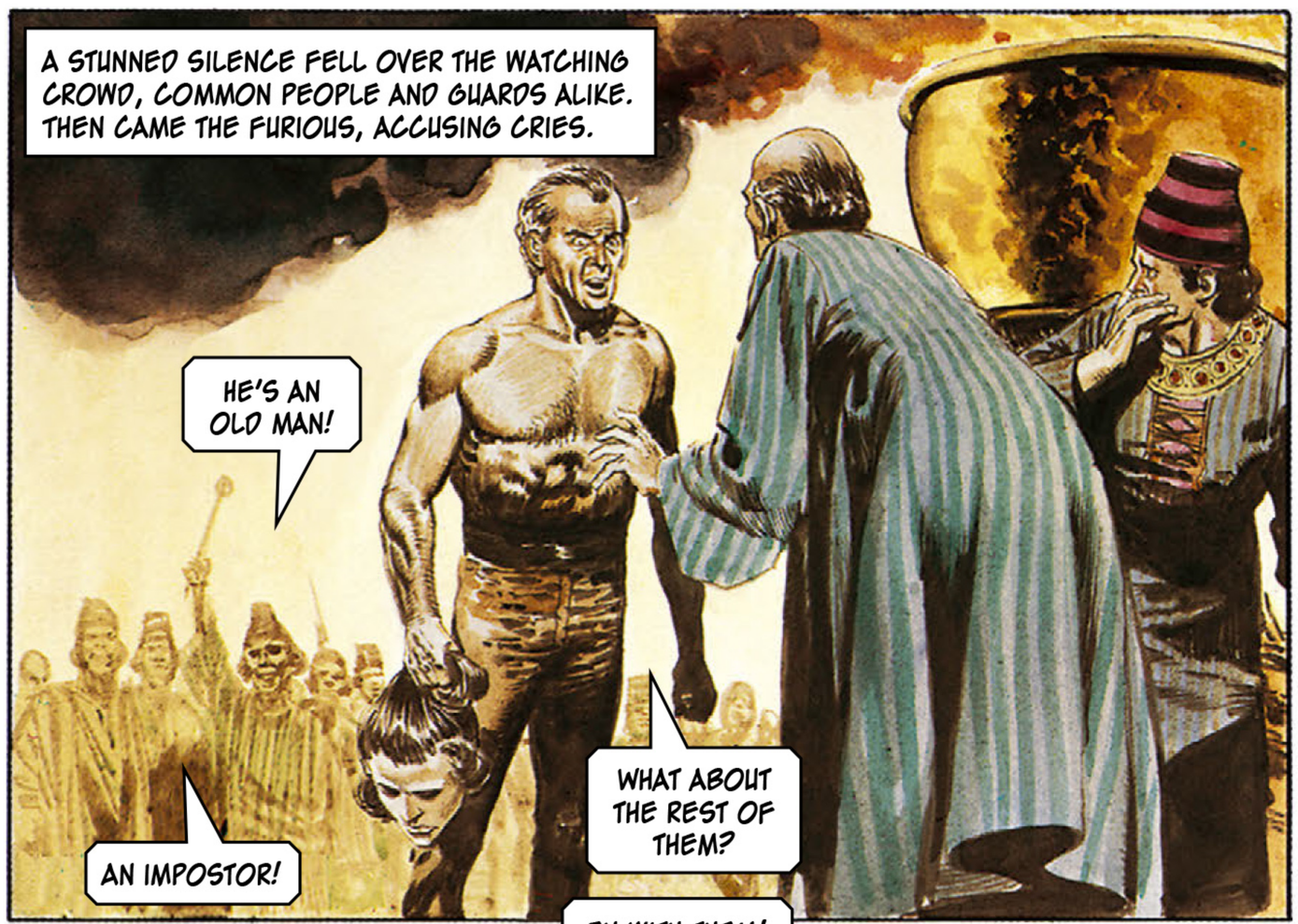

MARRUS STARED AT HIS FALLEN EMPEROR.
HE RISKED HIS LIFE TO SAVE ME – AFTER I BETRAYED HIM!
DON'T YOU REMEMBER HIS PROMISE? YOU SAVED HIS LIFE ONCE – AND HE NEVER FORGETS A DEBT!


BLINDED BY FURY AND REMORSE, THE ZARGOT-FIGHTER LEAPT INTO ACTION.
BY THE DEMONS OF DAVELI! I WILL MAKE AMENDS FOR MY TREACHERY!

AAAAAAH!

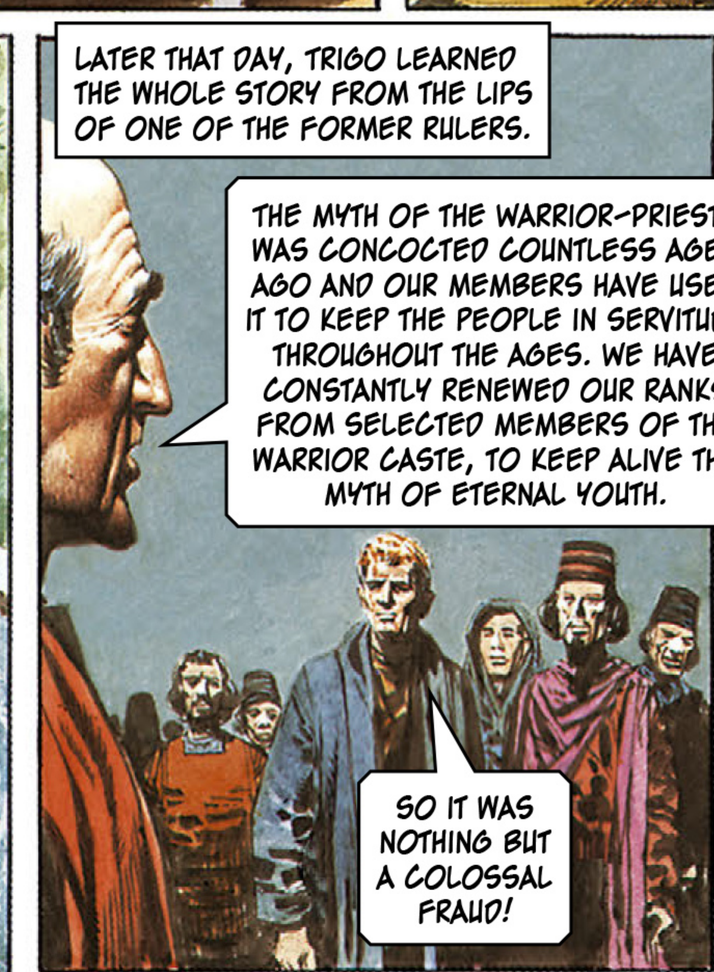
THE WARRIOR-PRIESTS OF THE JEWELLED CITY FLED BEFORE MARRUS.
AS FOR YOU ANIMALS – I'LL TRAMPLE YOUR ETERNAL YOUTH INTO THE DUST!

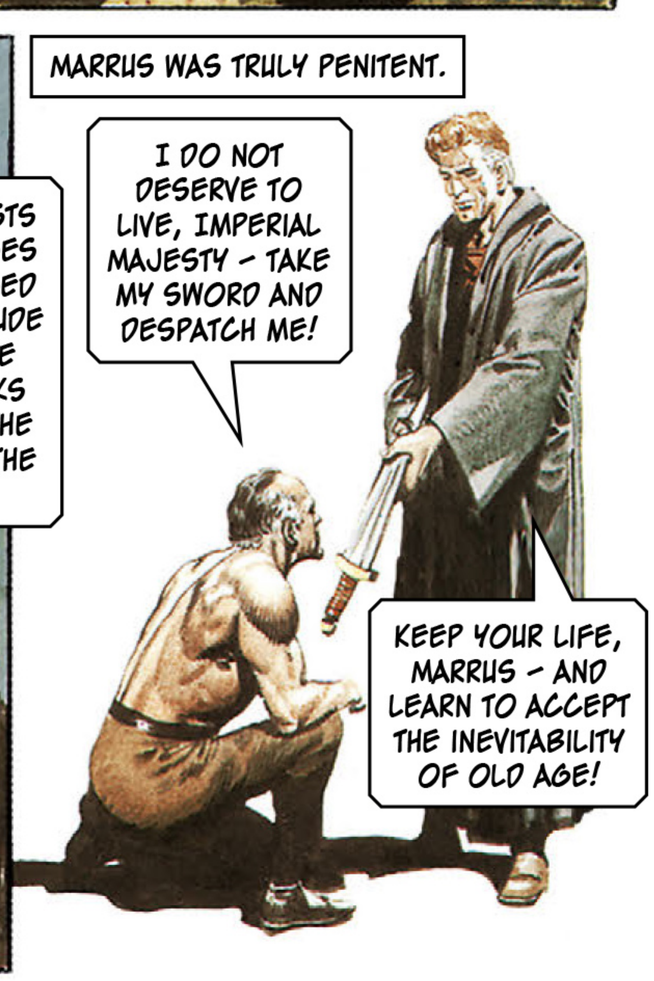
AND THEN – IT HAPPENED!
BY ALL THE STARS!

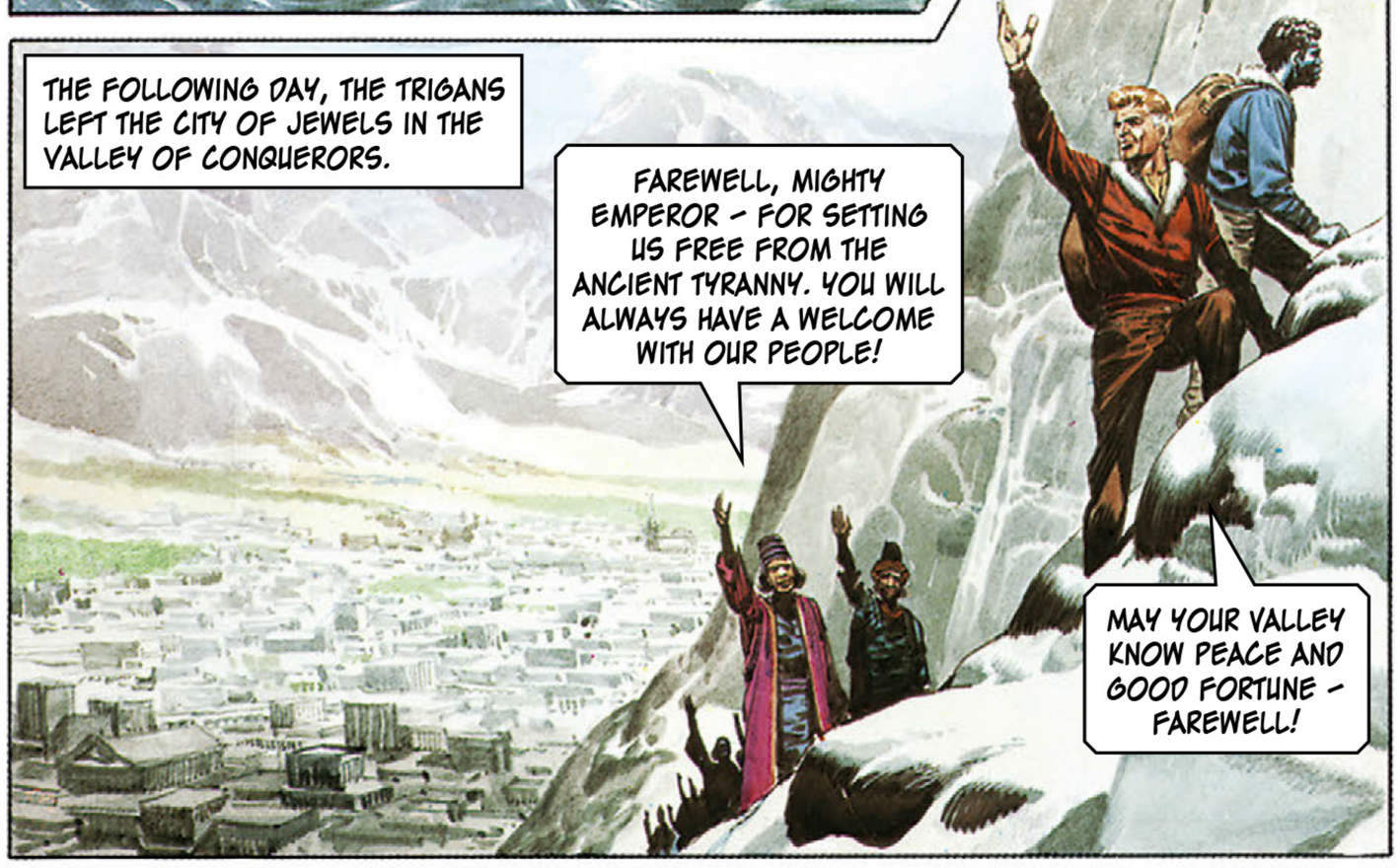

A STUNNED SILENCE FELL OVER THE WATCHING CROWD, COMMON PEOPLE AND GUARDS ALIKE. THEN CAME THE FURIOUS, ACCUSING CRIES.
HE'S AN OLD MAN!
AN IMPOSTOR!
WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THEM?

THE REST OF THE SO-CALLED WARRIOR-PRIESTS WERE UNMASKED. MOST WERE FOUND TO BE FRIGHTENED MEN WELL PAST MIDDLE AGE!
MERCY - MERCY!
SEE HOW THEY GROVEL - THE COWARDLY CURS!

THE UNMASKED WRETCHES WERE BORNE ALOFT AND HURLED INTO THE TEMPLE POOL.
IN WITH THEM!
NO, NO - AAAAGH!


LATER THAT DAY, TRIGO LEARNED THE WHOLE STORY FROM THE LIPS OF ONE OF THE FORMER RULERS.
THE MYTH OF THE WARRIOR-PRIESTS WAS CONCOCTED COUNTLESS AGES AGO AND OUR MEMBERS HAVE USED IT TO KEEP THE PEOPLE IN SERVITUDE THROUGHOUT THE AGES. WE HAVE CONSTANTLY RENEWED OUR RANKS FROM SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE WARRIOR CASTE, TO KEEP ALIVE THE MYTH OF ETERNAL YOUTH.
SO IT WAS NOTHING BUT A COLOSSAL FRAUD!


MARRUS WAS TRULY PENITENT.
I DO NOT DESERVE TO LIVE, IMPERIAL MAJESTY - TAKE MY SWORD AND DESPATCH ME!
KEEP YOUR LIFE, MARRUS - AND LEARN TO ACCEPT THE INEVITABILITY OF OLD AGE!


THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE TRIGANS LEFT THE CITY OF JEWELS IN THE VALLEY OF CONQUERORS.
FAREWELL, MIGHTY EMPEROR - FOR SETTING US FREE FROM THE ANCIENT TYRANNY. YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE A WELCOME WITH OUR PEOPLE!
MAY YOUR VALLEY KNOW PEACE AND GOOD FORTUNE - FAREWELL!

THEY JOURNEYED DOWN THE RIVER DAVELI, BACK TO CIVILISATION. AND MARRUS, AT LEAST, WAS A WISER MAN.
LET THE YOUNGER FELLOWS FIGHT ZARGOTS IN THE AMPHITHEATRE, I'M GOING TO RETIRE AND TAKE UP FISHING AS A HOBBY. AND, DO YOU KNOW, JANNO, I'M QUITE LOOKING FORWARD TO IT!

XXVIII

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

THE UNSCRUPULOUS SERVANT

Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 489-496

29th May 1971 – 10th July 1971

ON THE PLEASANT HILLS OVERLOOKING TRIGAN CITY STAND THE LUXURIOUS VILLAS OF THE VERY RICH. IN THE GARDEN OF ONE OF THE MOST SUMPTUOUS OF THESE LOUNGED AN ELEGANT FIGURE...

RITTO! CONFOUND IT! WHERE IS THE LAZY OAF?

COMING, MY LORD.

THE YOUNG MAN WAS NILS ZENNA, A PILOT IN THE IMPERIAL AIR FLEET AND THE HEIR TO ONE OF THE BIGGEST FORTUNES OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. HE WAS ALSO INSUFFERABLY ARROGANT.

YOU CAN POUR ME ANOTHER COOL DRINK, THEN GO AND LAY OUT MY FLYING CLOTHES. I HAVE TO GO ON PATROL THIS AFTERNOON.

YES, MY LORD.

OUTWARDLY HUMBLE, THE SERVANT RITTO NURSED A DEEP HATRED FOR HIS YOUNG MASTER.

MAY THE FATES BE KIND, AND ALLOW SOME CATON FIGHTER-CRAFT TO SHOOT YOU DOWN IN FLAMES THIS AFTERNOON, YOU ANIMAL!

AT THAT TIME, THE EMPIRE WAS ENGAGED IN A SPORADIC WAR WITH THE NEIGHBOURING STATE OF CATO. LATER, NILS ZENNA SWAGGERED INTO THE AIR BASE, FULL OF CONFIDENCE.

YOU HAD BETTER BE GOOD, VOSS! I AIM TO ADD TO MY SCORE OF KILLS THIS AFTERNOON.

SOME TIME LATER, THE TRIGAN FIGHTER-CRAFT WAS PATROLLING ABOVE THE TRACKLESS DAVELI JUNGLE.

ENEMY CRAFT APPROACHING, SIR!

GOOD. I WILL ENGAGE HIM.

NILS ZENNA THREW HIS CRAFT INTO THE FIGHT WITH CONFIDENCE, UNAWARE THAT HE HAD FALLEN INTO A TRAP!

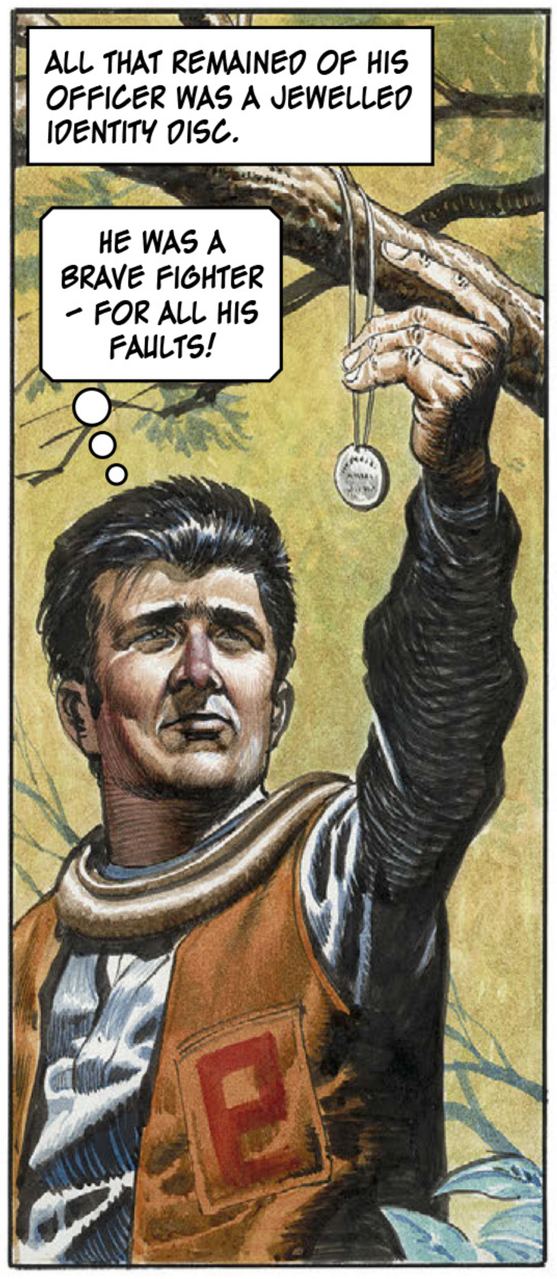
THREE MORE COMING AT US OUT OF THE SUN, SIR!

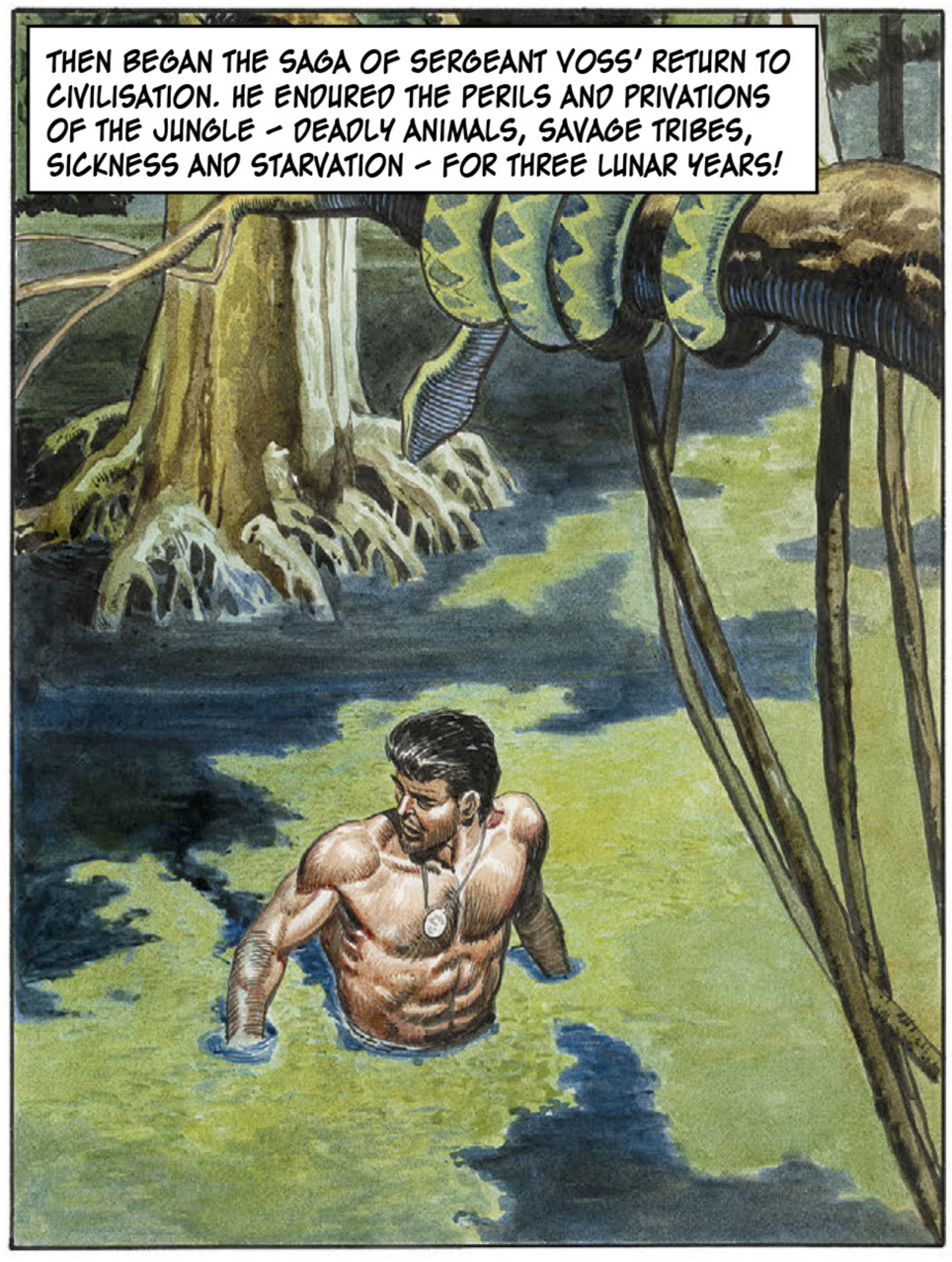
THE TRIGANS NEVER HAD A CHANCE!

WE'RE GOING TO CRASH!

THE DOOMED CRAFT PLOUGHED A FLAMING FURROW THROUGH THE JUNGLE AND SHATTERED ITSELF AGAINST A TREE.

LATER – MUCH LATER – SERGEANT VOSS DRAGGED HIMSELF PAINFULLY FROM THE WRECKAGE.
SIR! WHERE ARE YOU? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

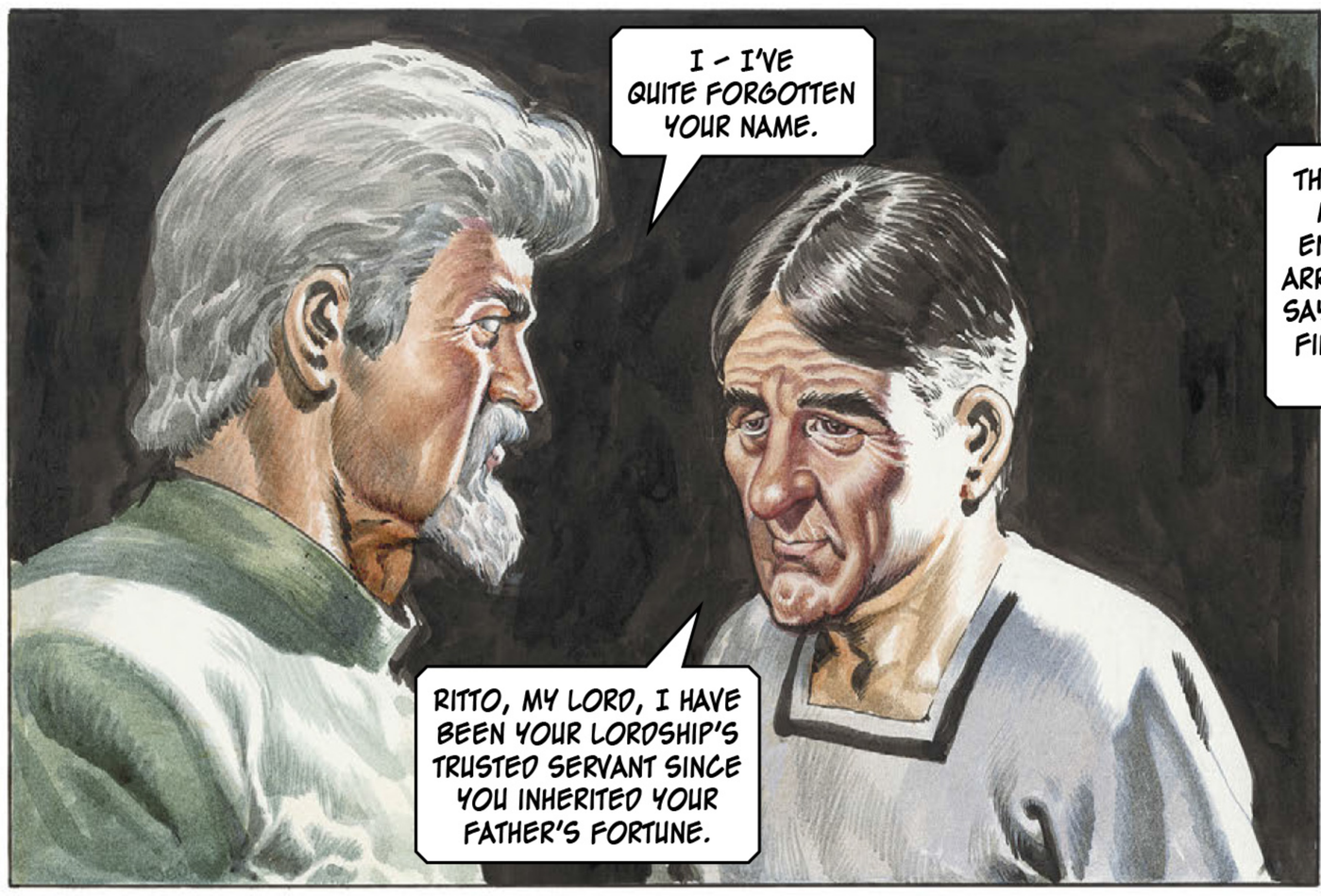

ALL THAT REMAINED OF HIS OFFICER WAS A JEWELLED IDENTITY DISC.
HE WAS A BRAVE FIGHTER – FOR ALL HIS FAULTS!


THEN BEGAN THE SAGA OF SERGEANT VOSS' RETURN TO CIVILISATION. HE ENDURED THE PERILS AND PRIVATIONS OF THE JUNGLE – DEADLY ANIMALS, SAVAGE TRIBES, SICKNESS AND STARVATION – FOR THREE LUNAR YEARS!

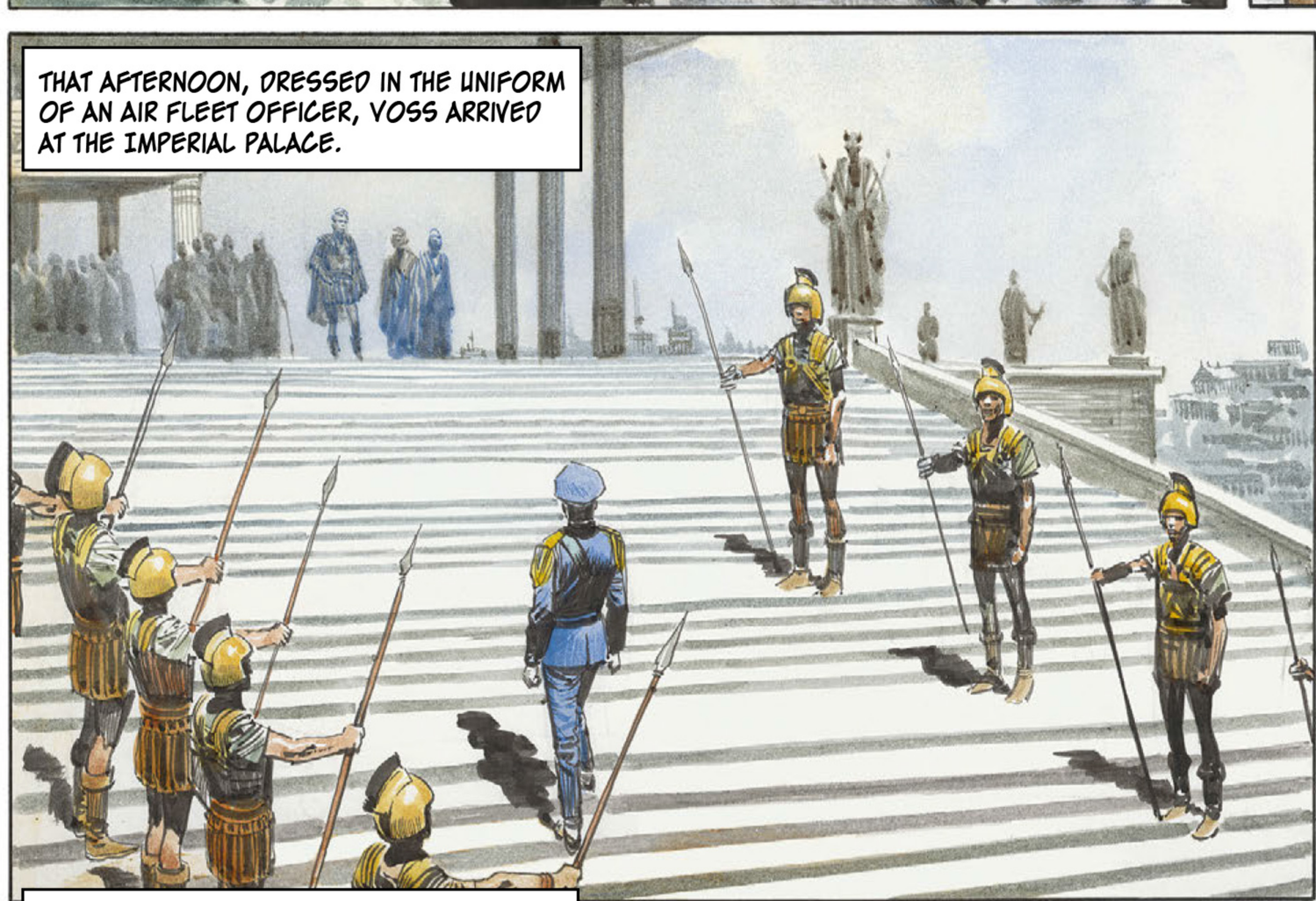
THREE LUNAR YEARS AFTER THE CRASH, AN UNRECOGNISABLE FIGURE COLLAPSED AT A TRIGAN OUTPOST.
HIS HAIR AND BEARD ARE WHITE, THOUGH HE LOOKS A YOUNG MAN!
HE'S WEARING AN OFFICER'S IDENTITY DISC.

HE WAS GIVEN EVERY MEDICAL CARE.
NILS ZENNA! BUT HE WAS GIVEN UP YEARS AGO!
AND NOW, DOCTOR, YOU HAVE THE HONOUR OF TENDING THE RICHEST MAN IN THE TRIGAN EMPIRE!

THE MAN WHO WAS BELIEVED TO BE NILS ZENNA WAS GIVEN A HERO'S WELCOME ON HIS RETURN TO TRIGAN CITY.
THERE HE IS! WHITE-HAIRED AFTER HIS NIGHTMARE JOURNEY OF THREE YEARS THROUGH THE JUNGLE!
IS IT TRUE THAT THE EMPEROR IS TO INVEST YOU WITH THE JEWELLED STAR OF TRIGAN?
ER- SO I AM TOLD.
ONE OF THE VIEWERS OF THE RELAYED PROGRAMME WAS NILS ZENNA'S SERVANT, RITTO.
SO HE'S RETURNED AFTER ALL THESE YEARS! THEN I AM IN TROUBLE - BIG TROUBLE!
AS HE WAS DRIVEN THROUGH THE GARLANDED STREETS, VOSS FOUGHT WITH HIS CONSCIENCE.
WHY AM I GOING THROUGH WITH THIS MASQUERADE? WHY DON'T I ADMIT THAT NILS ZENNA PERISHED IN THE CRASH AND THAT I AM JUST POOR SERGEANT VOSS, THE SON OF A TAILOR?
THEN HE SAW NILS ZENNA'S SUMPTUOUS VILLA - AND FORGOT HIS DOUBTS.
WHAT USE IS THIS PLACE TO ZENNA NOW? IT CAN BE MINE - ALL MINE!
LATER...
MY LORD - I OBTAINED A FULL-DRESS AIR FLEET UNIFORM FOR YOU TO WEAR AT THE PALACE THIS AFTERNOON.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH - ER...


I – I'VE QUITE FORGOTTEN YOUR NAME.
RITTO, MY LORD, I HAVE BEEN YOUR LORDSHIP'S TRUSTED SERVANT SINCE YOU INHERITED YOUR FATHER'S FORTUNE.

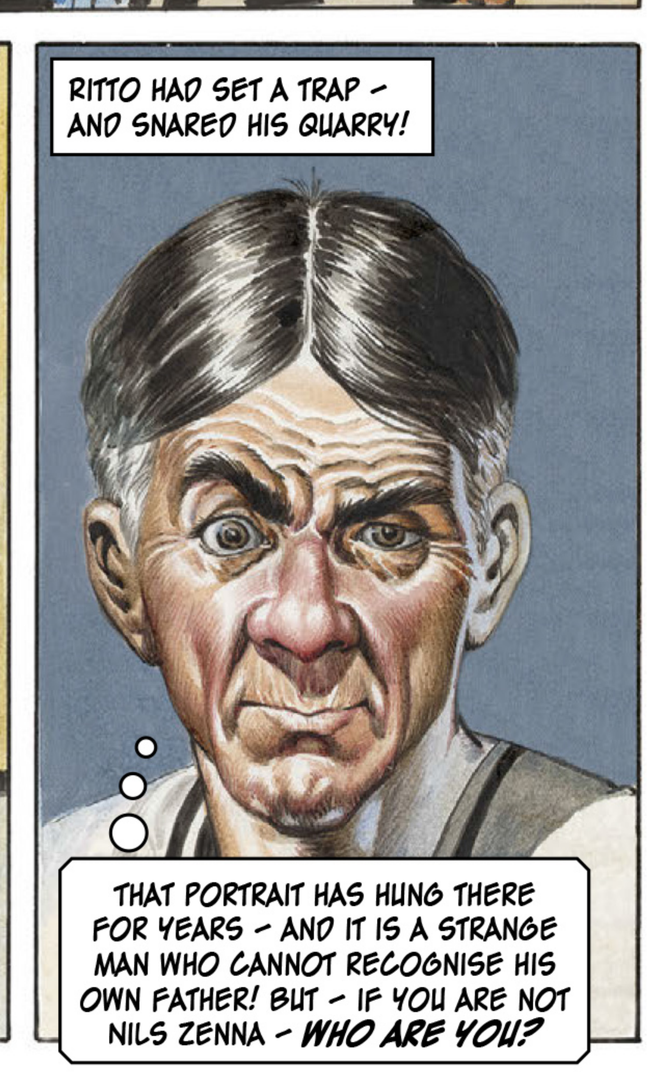
THE INCIDENT GAVE RITTO FOOD FOR THOUGHT.
THAT HE SHOULD FORGET MY NAME IS STRANGE ENOUGH – BUT WHY THAT ARROGANT ANIMAL SHOULD SAY "THANK YOU" FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE IS PAST ALL BELIEF!


THAT AFTERNOON, DRESSED IN THE UNIFORM OF AN AIR FLEET OFFICER, VOSS ARRIVED AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE.

SOON, HE STOOD BEFORE THE EMPEROR TRIGO.
IN RECOGNITION OF YOUR VALOUR IN THE LATE WAR WITH CATO, AND FOR YOUR REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT IN FIGHTING YOUR WAY OUT OF THE JUNGLE!

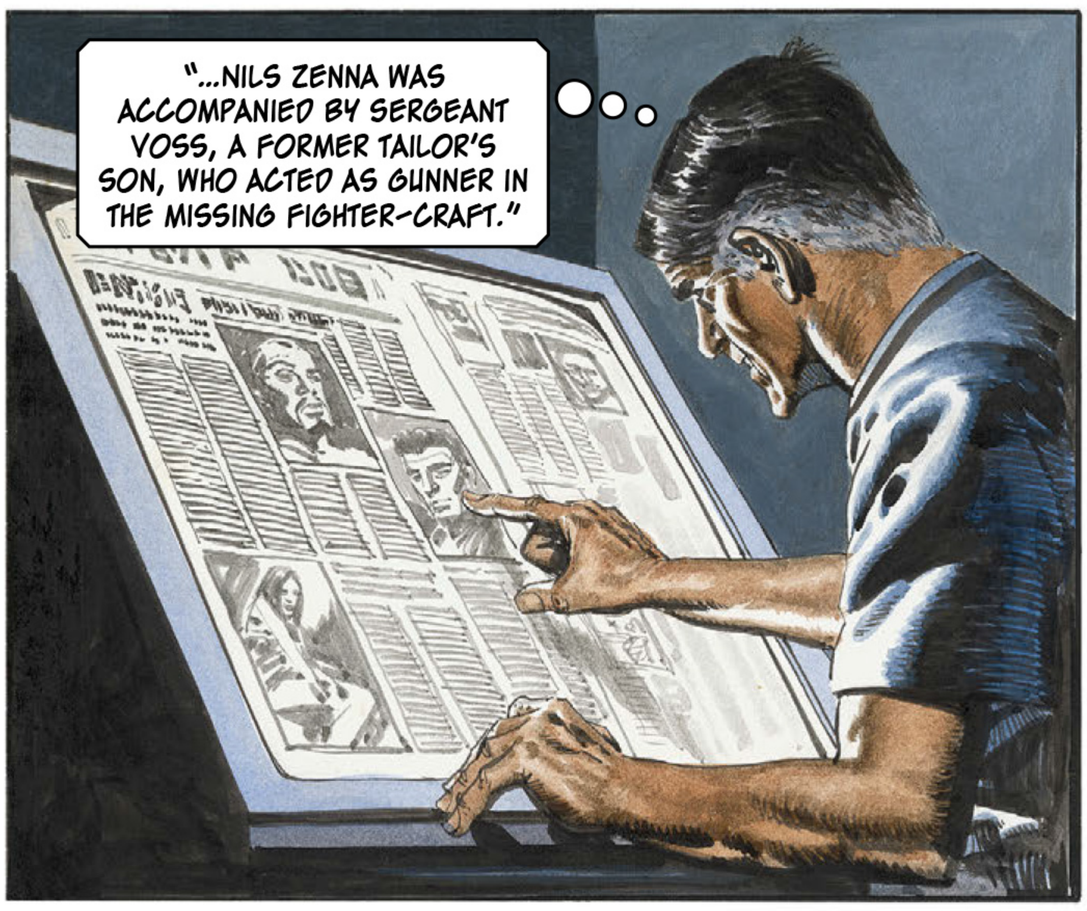
LATER, THE EMPEROR WAS MORE INFORMAL.
PERHAPS YOU WILL ACCOMPANY US ON THE ZARGOT HUNT TOMORROW.
THAT WILL BE AN HONOUR, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

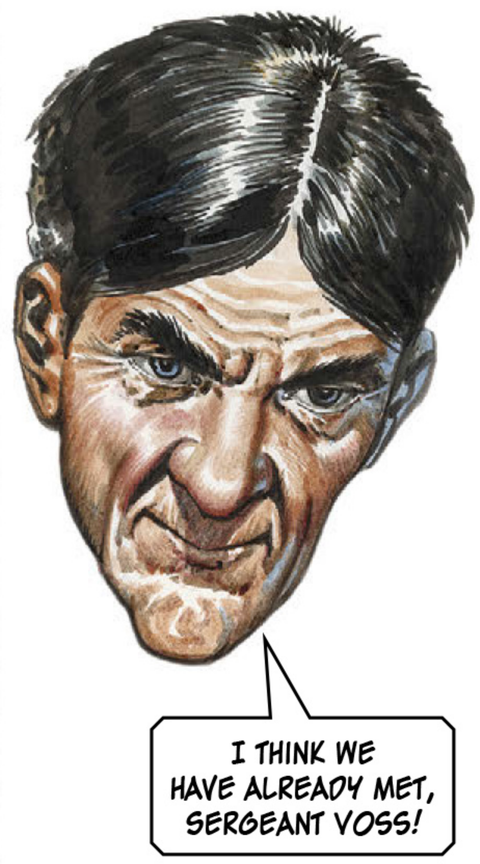
RETURNING TO THE VILLA, VOSS WAS GREETED BY HIS SERVANT.
DURING YOUR ABSENCE IN THE JUNGLE, MY LORD, I MADE VARIOUS CHANGES AROUND THE ESTABLISHMENT – I PURCHASED THAT PORTRAIT, FOR INSTANCE.
VERY NICE – WHO'S IT SUPPOSED TO BE?


RITTO HAD SET A TRAP – AND SNARED HIS QUARRY!
THAT PORTRAIT HAS HUNG THERE FOR YEARS – AND IT IS A STRANGE MAN WHO CANNOT RECOGNISE HIS OWN FATHER! BUT – IF YOU ARE NOT NILS ZENNA – WHO ARE YOU?

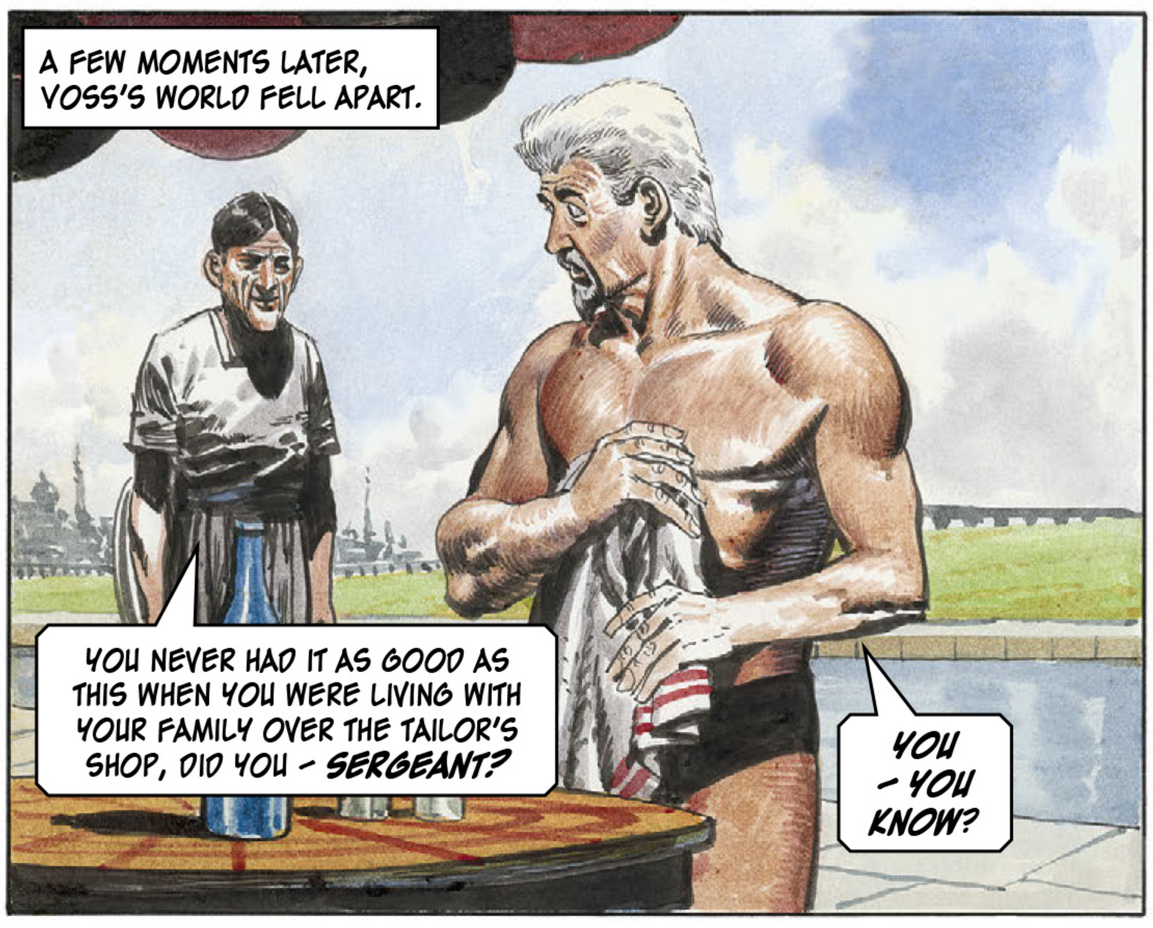
LATER THAT DAY, RITTO THE SERVANT WENT TO THE PUBLIC RECORDS LIBRARY IN TRIGAN CITY.
I THINK I KNOW WHO HE REALLY IS.

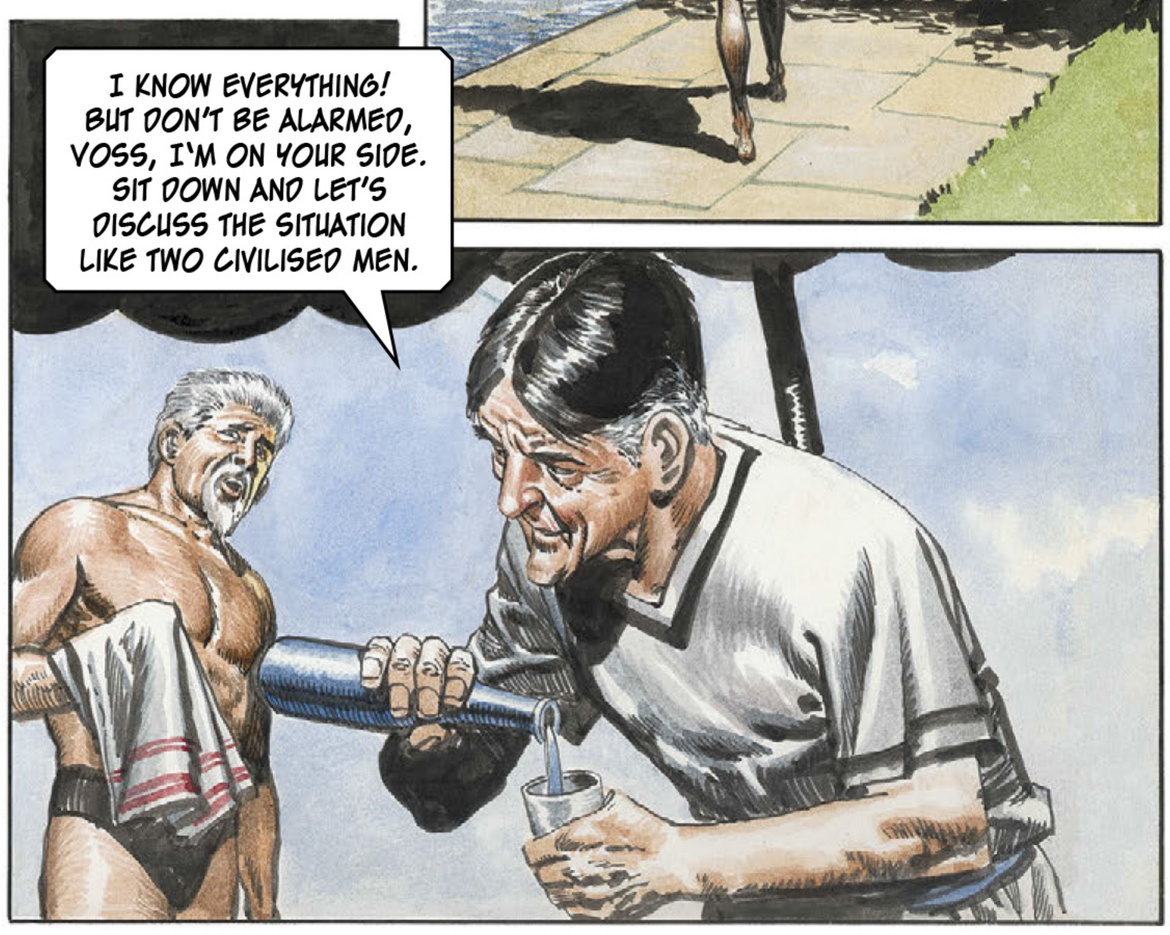
I WISH TO SEE THE RECORDS OF THE AIR CRASH INVOLVING NILS ZENNA THREE YEARS AGO.
I WILL HAVE THEM PROJECTED FOR YOU, SIR.

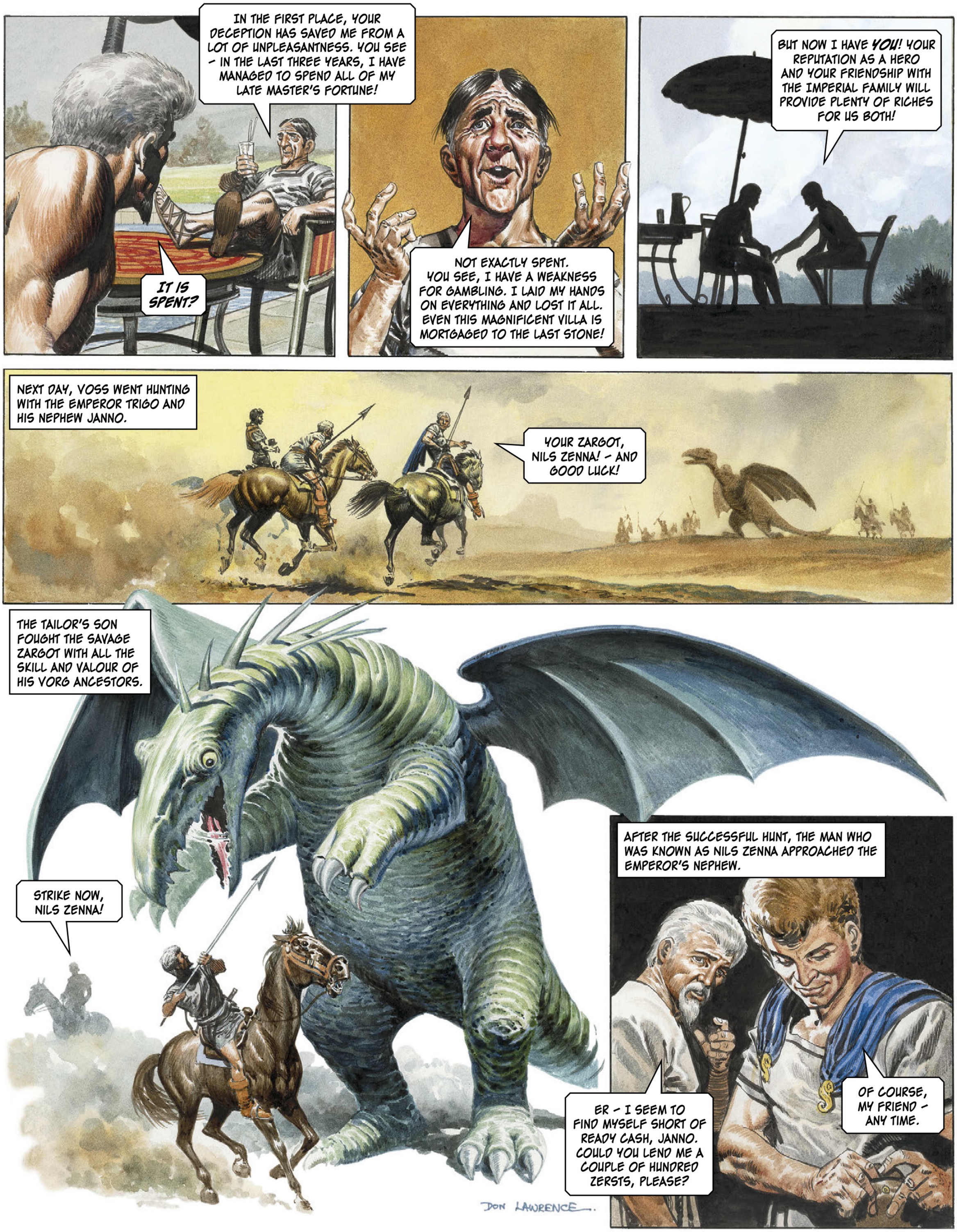

"...NILS ZENNA WAS ACCOMPANIED BY SERGEANT VOSS, A FORMER TAILOR'S SON, WHO ACTED AS GUNNER IN THE MISSING FIGHTER-CRAFT."

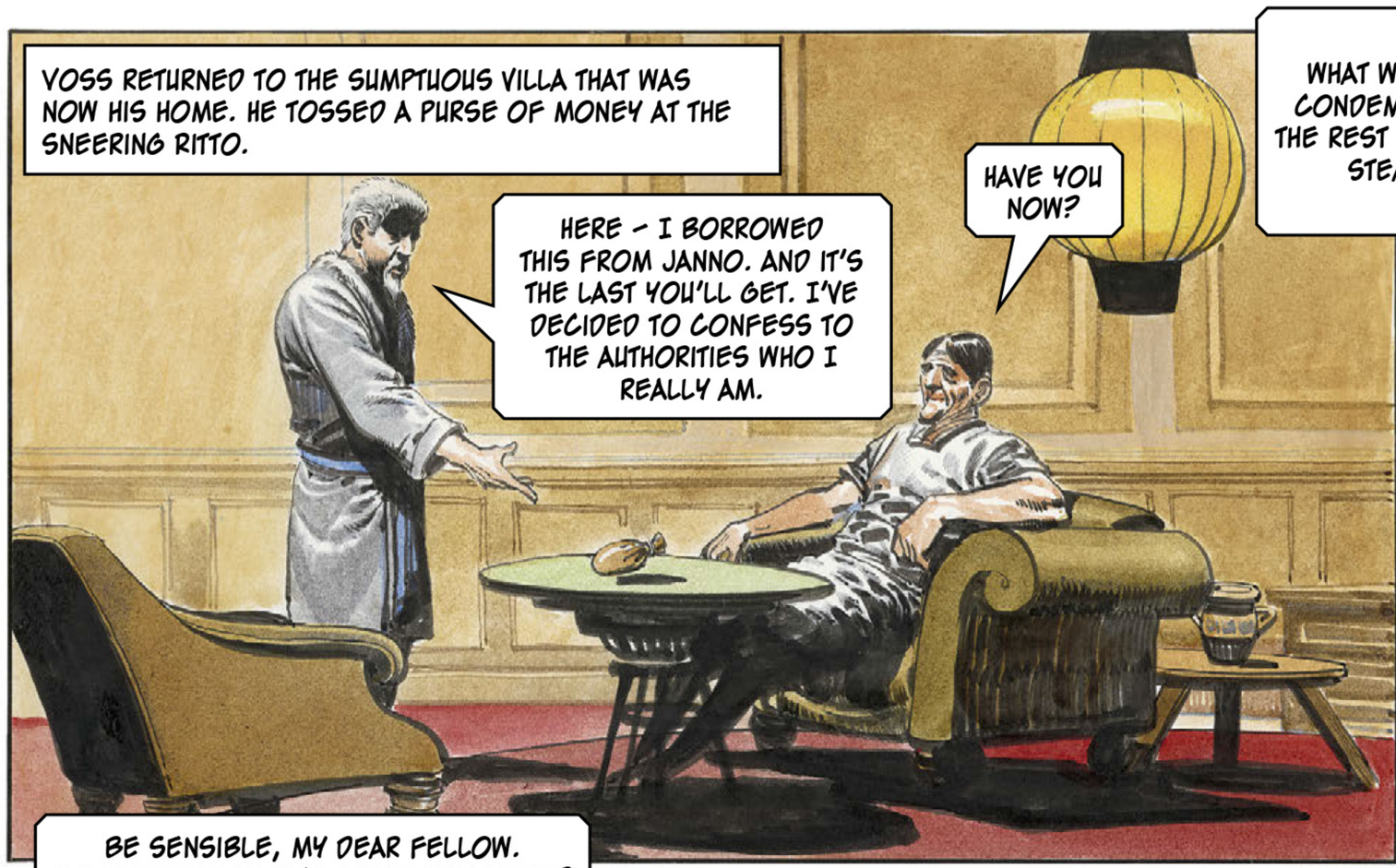

I THINK WE HAVE ALREADY MET, SERGEANT VOSS!

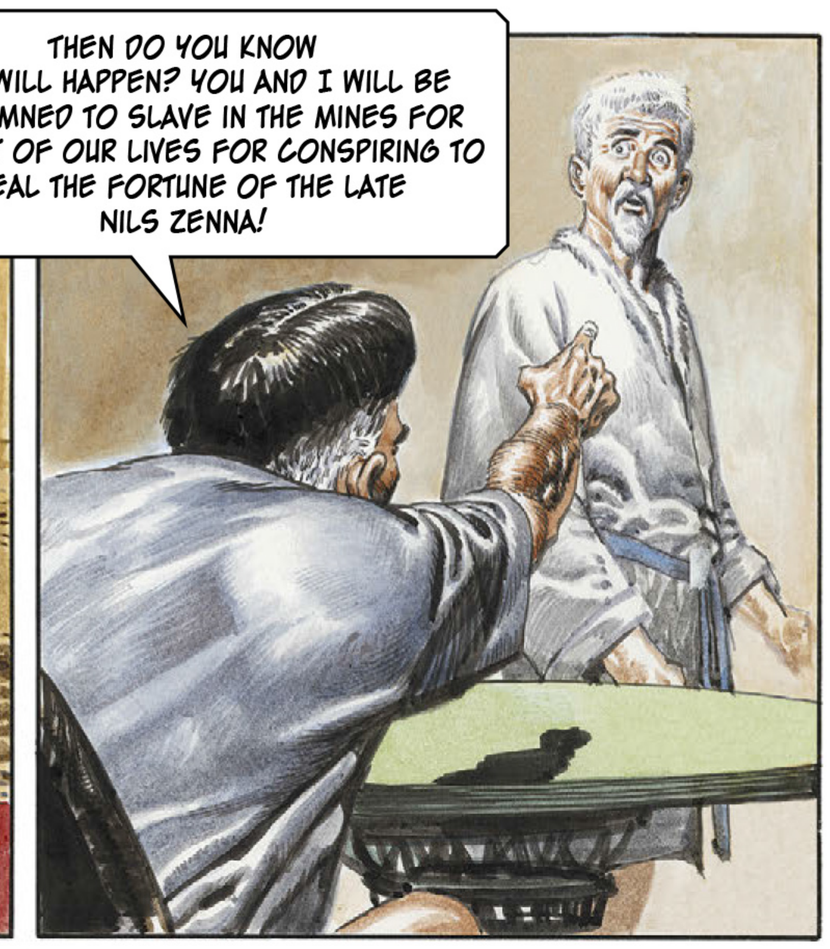
RETURNING TO THE VILLA, HE FOUND HIS "MASTER" AT THE SWIMMING POOL.
THE WORTHY SERGEANT ENJOYS THE RICH WAY OF LIFE!


A FEW MOMENTS LATER, VOSS'S WORLD FELL APART.
YOU NEVER HAD IT AS GOOD AS THIS WHEN YOU WERE LIVING WITH YOUR FAMILY OVER THE TAILOR'S SHOP, DID YOU - SERGEANT?
YOU - YOU KNOW?

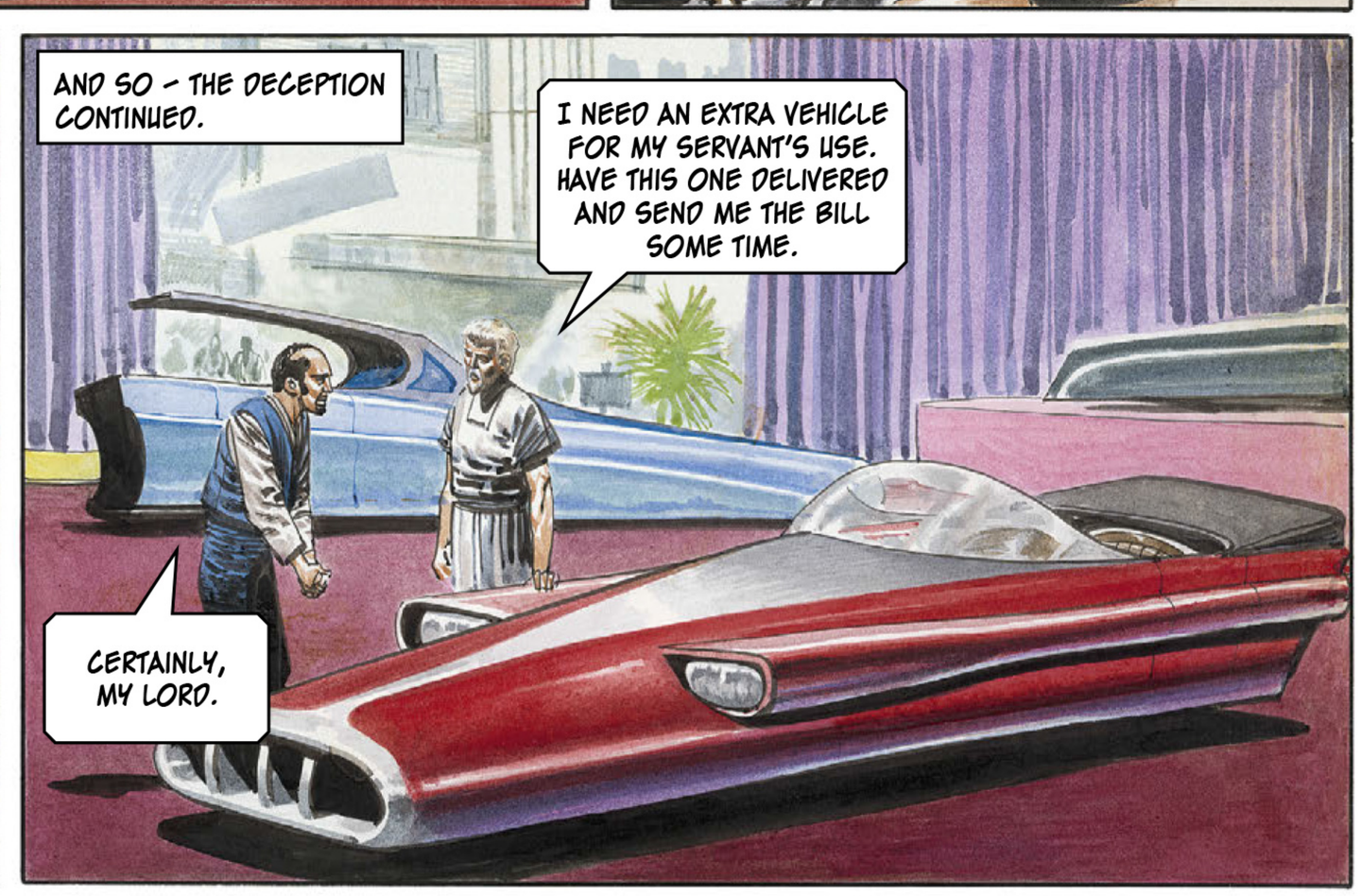

I KNOW EVERYTHING! BUT DON'T BE ALARMED, VOSS, I'M ON YOUR SIDE. SIT DOWN AND LET'S DISCUSS THE SITUATION LIKE TWO CIVILISED MEN.


IN THE FIRST PLACE, YOUR DECEPTION HAS SAVED ME FROM A LOT OF UNPLEASANTNESS. YOU SEE – IN THE LAST THREE YEARS, I HAVE MANAGED TO SPEND ALL OF MY LATE MASTER'S FORTUNE!
IT IS SPENT?
NOT EXACTLY SPENT. YOU SEE, I HAVE A WEAKNESS FOR GAMBLING. I LAID MY HANDS ON EVERYTHING AND LOST IT ALL. EVEN THIS MAGNIFICENT VILLA IS MORTGAGED TO THE LAST STONE!
BUT NOW I HAVE YOU! YOUR REPUTATION AS A HERO AND YOUR FRIENDSHIP WITH THE IMPERIAL FAMILY WILL PROVIDE PLENTY OF RICHES FOR US BOTH!
NEXT DAY, VOSS WENT HUNTING WITH THE EMPEROR TRIGO AND HIS NEPHEW JANNO.
YOUR ZARGOT, NILS ZENNA! – AND GOOD LUCK!
THE TAILOR'S SON FOUGHT THE SAVAGE ZARGOT WITH ALL THE SKILL AND VALOUR OF HIS VORG ANCESTORS.
STRIKE NOW, NILS ZENNA!
AFTER THE SUCCESSFUL HUNT, THE MAN WHO WAS KNOWN AS NILS ZENNA APPROACHED THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW.
ER – I SEEM TO FIND MYSELF SHORT OF READY CASH, JANNO. COULD YOU LEND ME A COUPLE OF HUNDRED ZERSTS, PLEASE?
OF COURSE, MY FRIEND – ANY TIME.
DON LAWRENCE

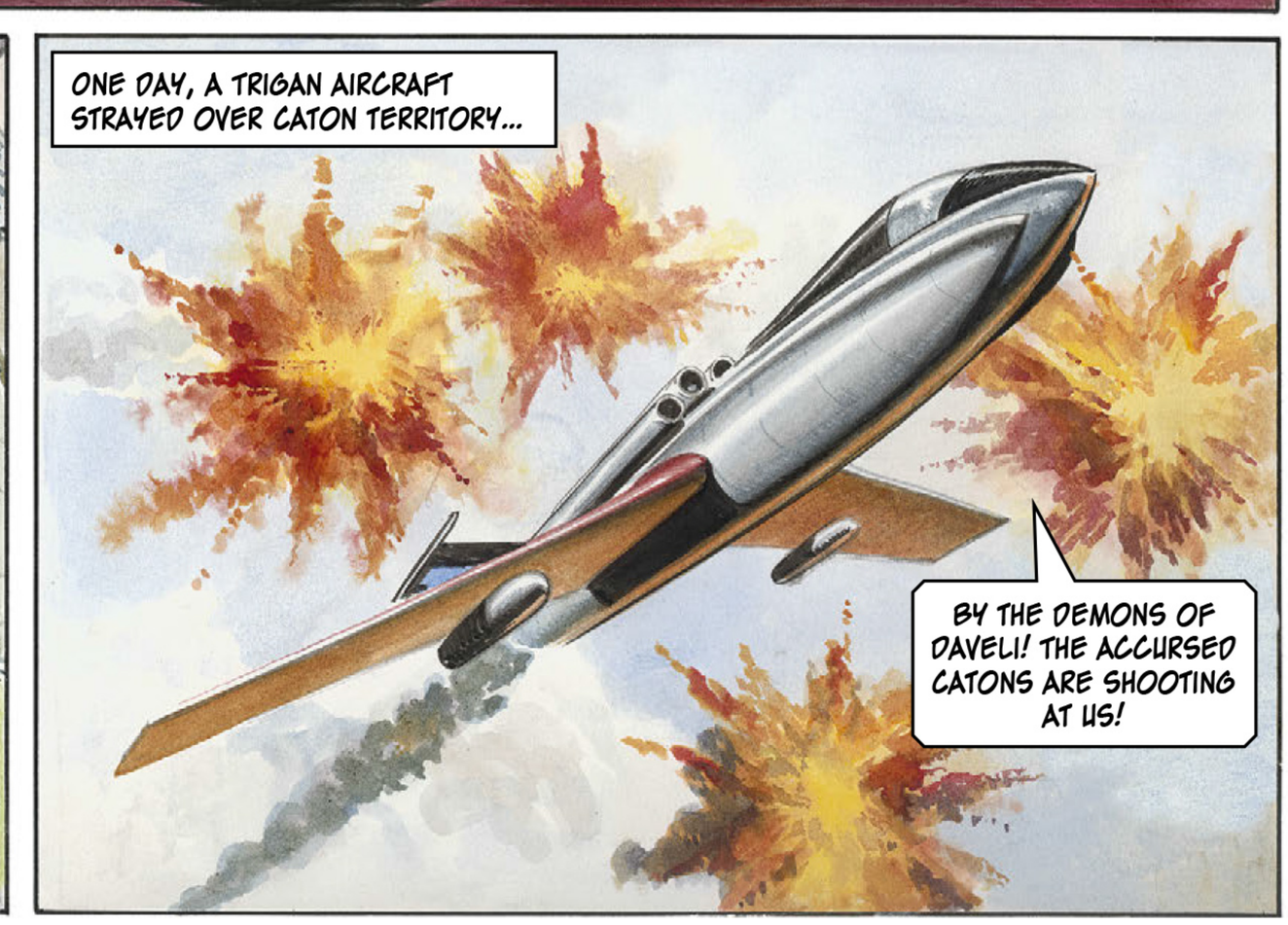

VOSS RETURNED TO THE SUMPTUOUS VILLA THAT WAS NOW HIS HOME. HE TOSSED A PURSE OF MONEY AT THE SNEERING RITTO.
HERE – I BORROWED THIS FROM JANNO. AND IT'S THE LAST YOU'LL GET. I'VE DECIDED TO CONFESS TO THE AUTHORITIES WHO I REALLY AM.
HAVE YOU NOW?


THEN DO YOU KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN? YOU AND I WILL BE CONDEMNED TO SLAVE IN THE MINES FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES FOR CONSPIRING TO STEAL THE FORTUNE OF THE LATE NILS ZENNA!

BE SENSIBLE, MY DEAR FELLOW. DO YOU WANT TO LIVE A LIFE OF LUXURY? CERTAINLY, I'VE GAMBLED AWAY ALL THE FORTUNE, BUT NILS ZENNA'S NAME IS GOOD ENOUGH TO PROVIDE US WITH PLENTY MORE. LET'S ENJOY OURSELVES.
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S TOO LATE TO TURN BACK NOW.


AND SO – THE DECEPTION CONTINUED.
I NEED AN EXTRA VEHICLE FOR MY SERVANT'S USE. HAVE THIS ONE DELIVERED AND SEND ME THE BILL SOME TIME.
CERTAINLY, MY LORD.

WHEN THE BILLS BECAME PRESSING, THE IMPOSTER SIMPLY 'BORROWED' FROM THE FRIENDS HE HAD MADE AMONG THE IMPERIAL FAMILY.
DO YOU KNOW, BRAG – I BELIEVE I'VE COME OUT WITHOUT ANY MONEY!
HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT – WILL FIVE HUNDRED DO?

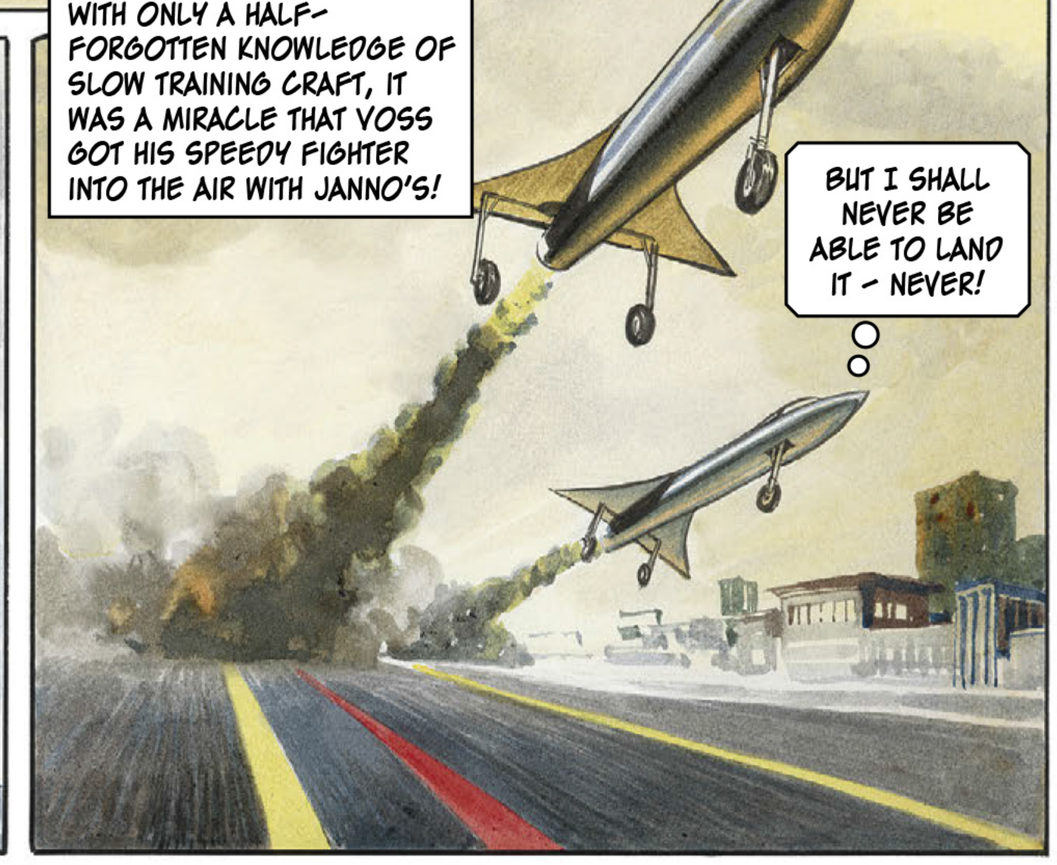

ONE DAY, A TRIGAN AIRCRAFT STRAYED OVER CATON TERRITORY...
BY THE DEMONS OF DAVELI! THE ACCURSED CATONS ARE SHOOTING AT US!

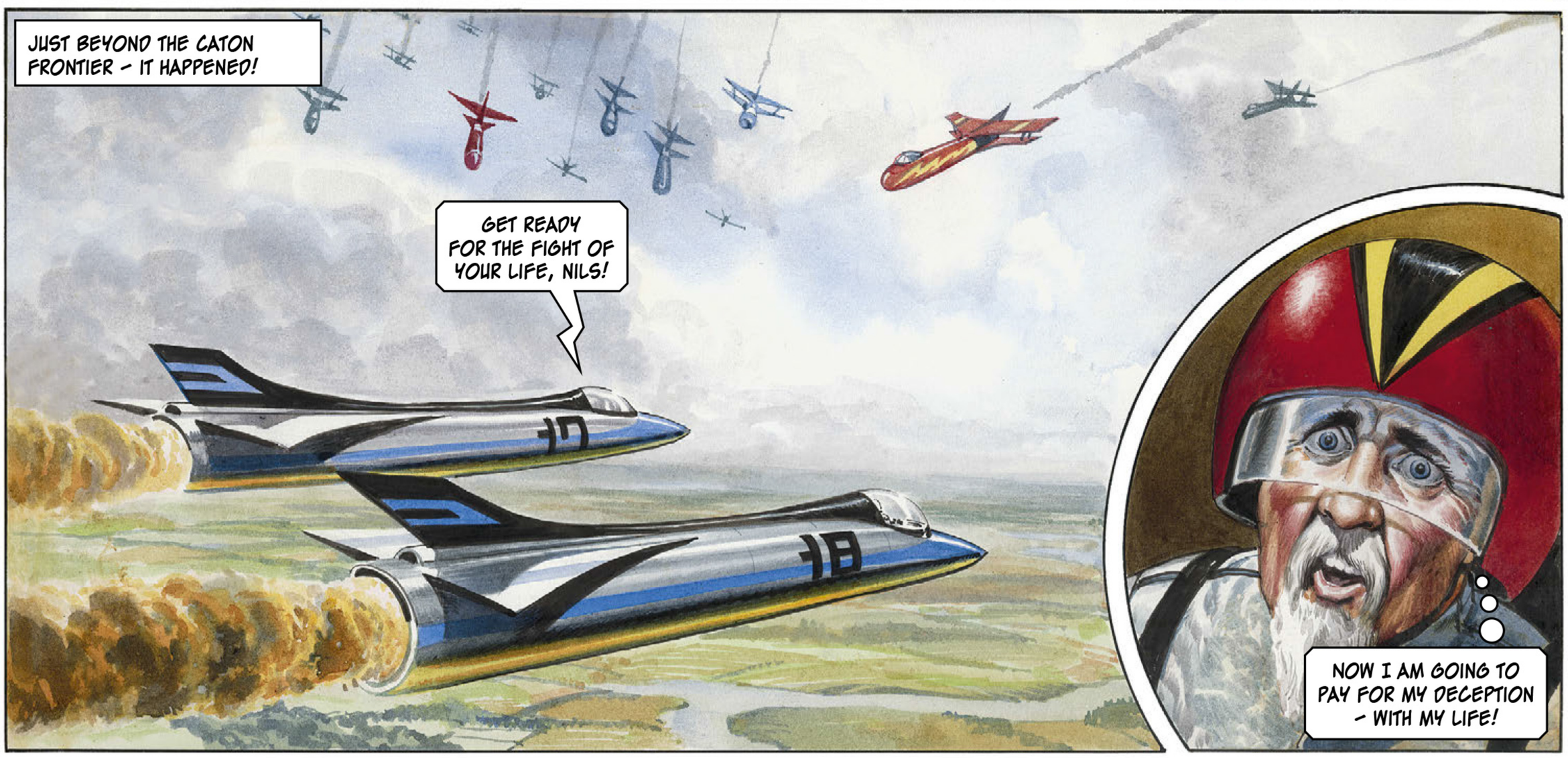
...AND WAS RUTHLESSLY SHOT DOWN!

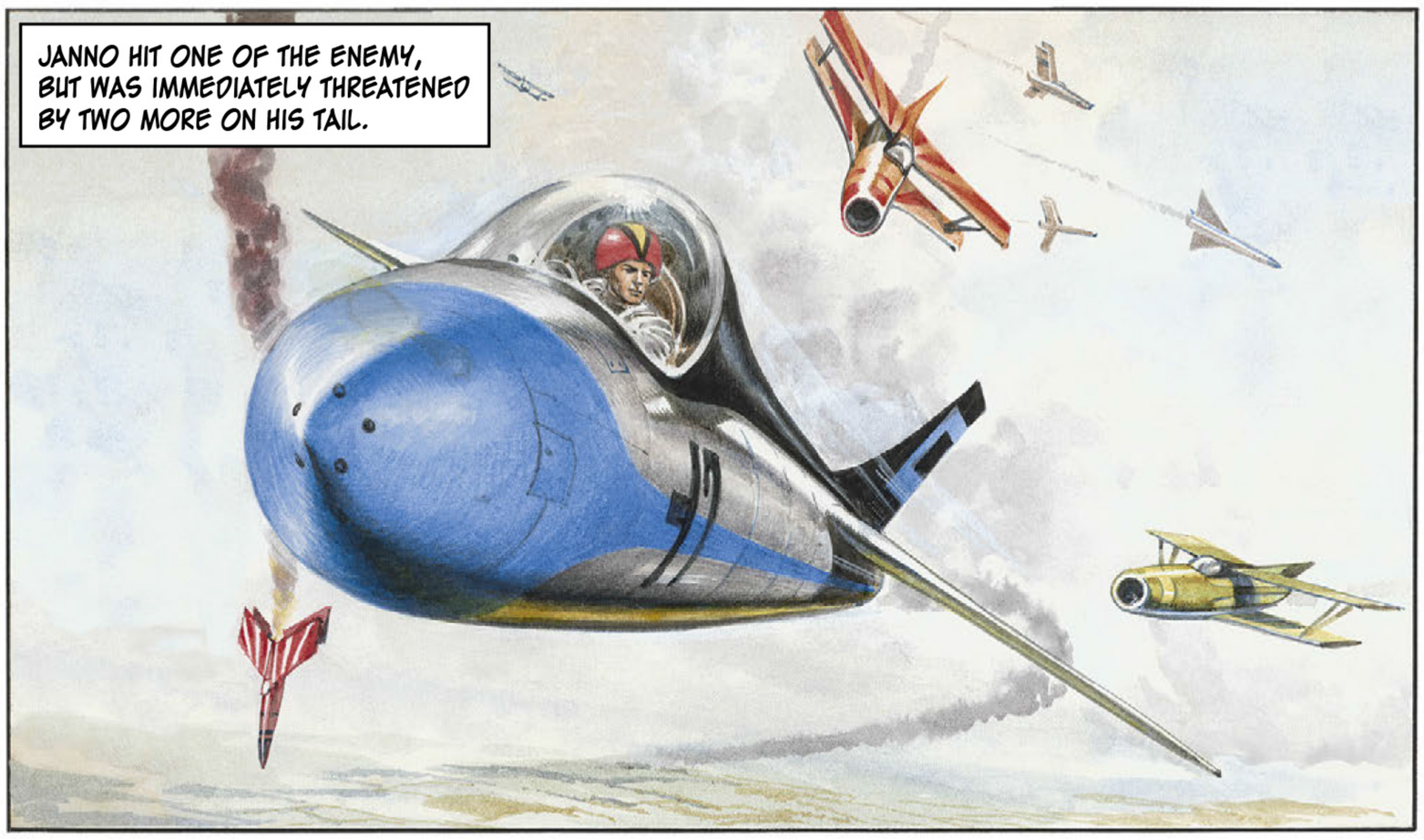
THE FOLLOWING DAY, A COMMUNICATION ARRIVED FROM THE AIR FLEET HEADQUARTERS, ADDRESSED TO NILS ZENNA!
BY ALL THE STARS! I'VE TO REPORT FOR FLYING DUTIES IMMEDIATELY! WE HAVE DECLARED WAR ON CATO, AND NILS ZENNA WAS AN OFFICER-PILOT OF THE RESERVE FLEET!
SO?

DON'T YOU SEE? NILS ZENNA WAS AN ACE PILOT, WHILE I FAILED MY PILOT'S TRAINING AND WAS MADE A GUNNER. I CAN BARELY *FLY* AN AIRCRAFT LET ALONE *FIGHT* IN ONE!
THEN YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO DO THE BEST YOU CAN, WON'T YOU, MY DEAR FELLOW?

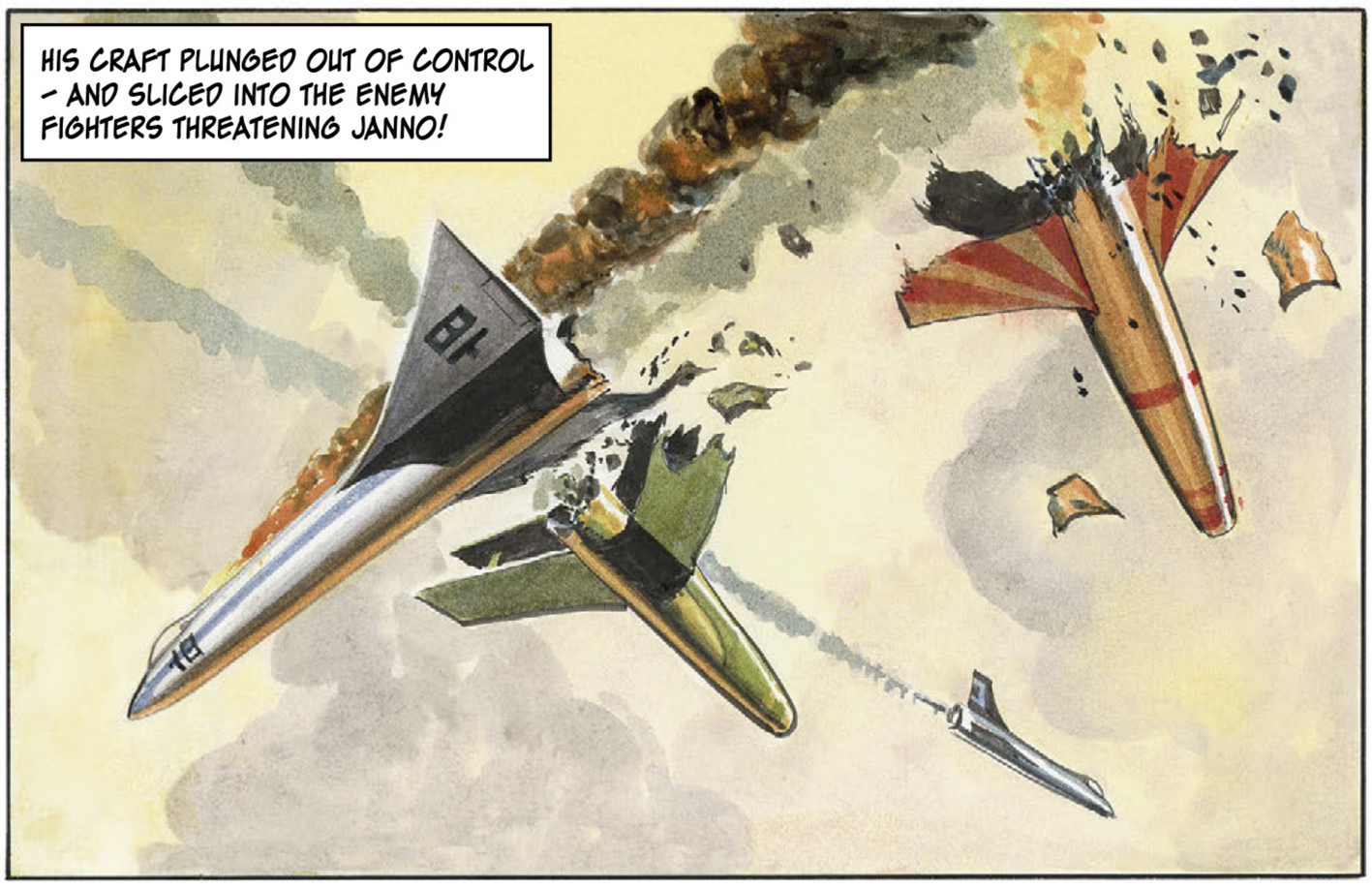
ON ARRIVAL AT THE AIR FLEET BASE, THE IMPOSTER WAS GREETED BY HIS NEW FRIEND JANNO.
WE'RE TO DO A TWO-MAN PATROL OVER THE FRONTIER, NILS. WOE BETIDE ANY CATON CRAFT THAT COMES WITHIN RANGE OF OUR GUNS, EH?

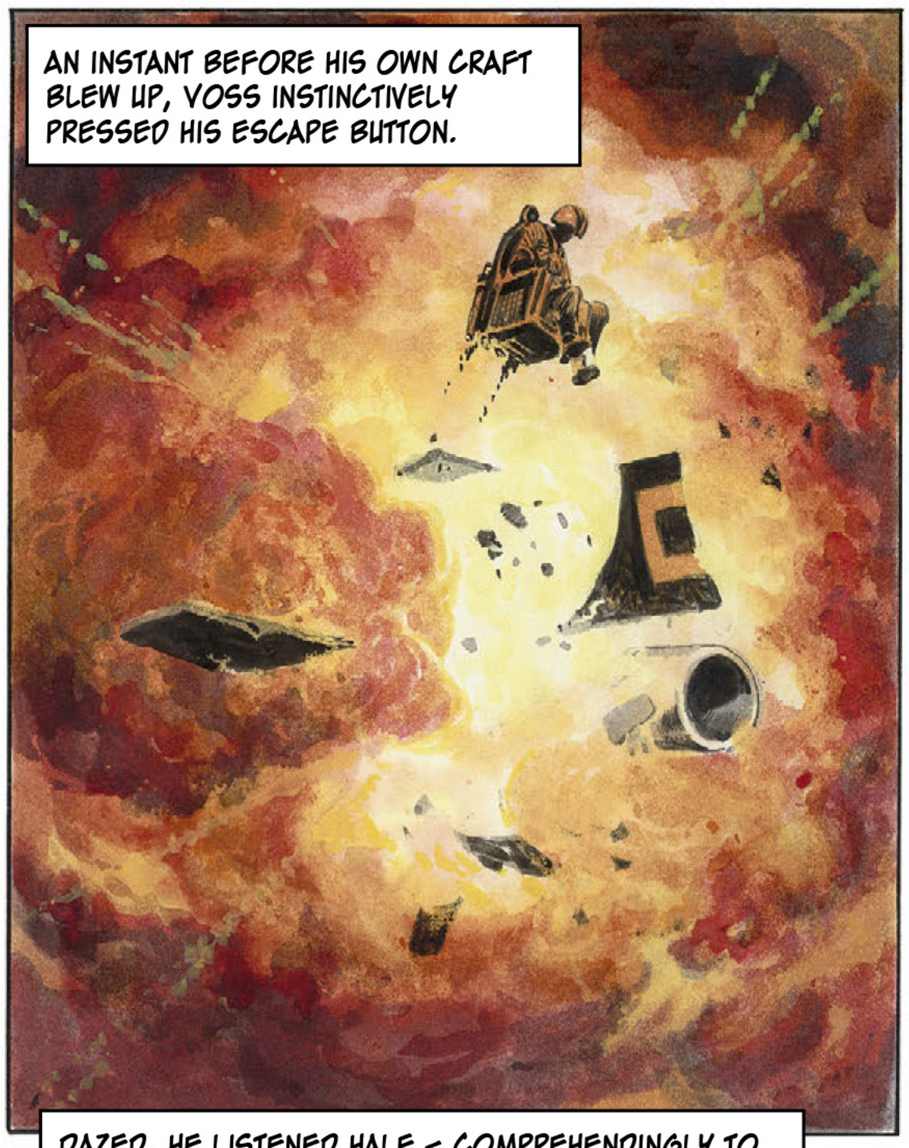

WITH ONLY A HALF-FORGOTTEN KNOWLEDGE OF SLOW TRAINING CRAFT, IT WAS A MIRACLE THAT VOSS GOT HIS SPEEDY FIGHTER INTO THE AIR WITH JANNO'S!
BUT I SHALL NEVER BE ABLE TO LAND IT - NEVER!

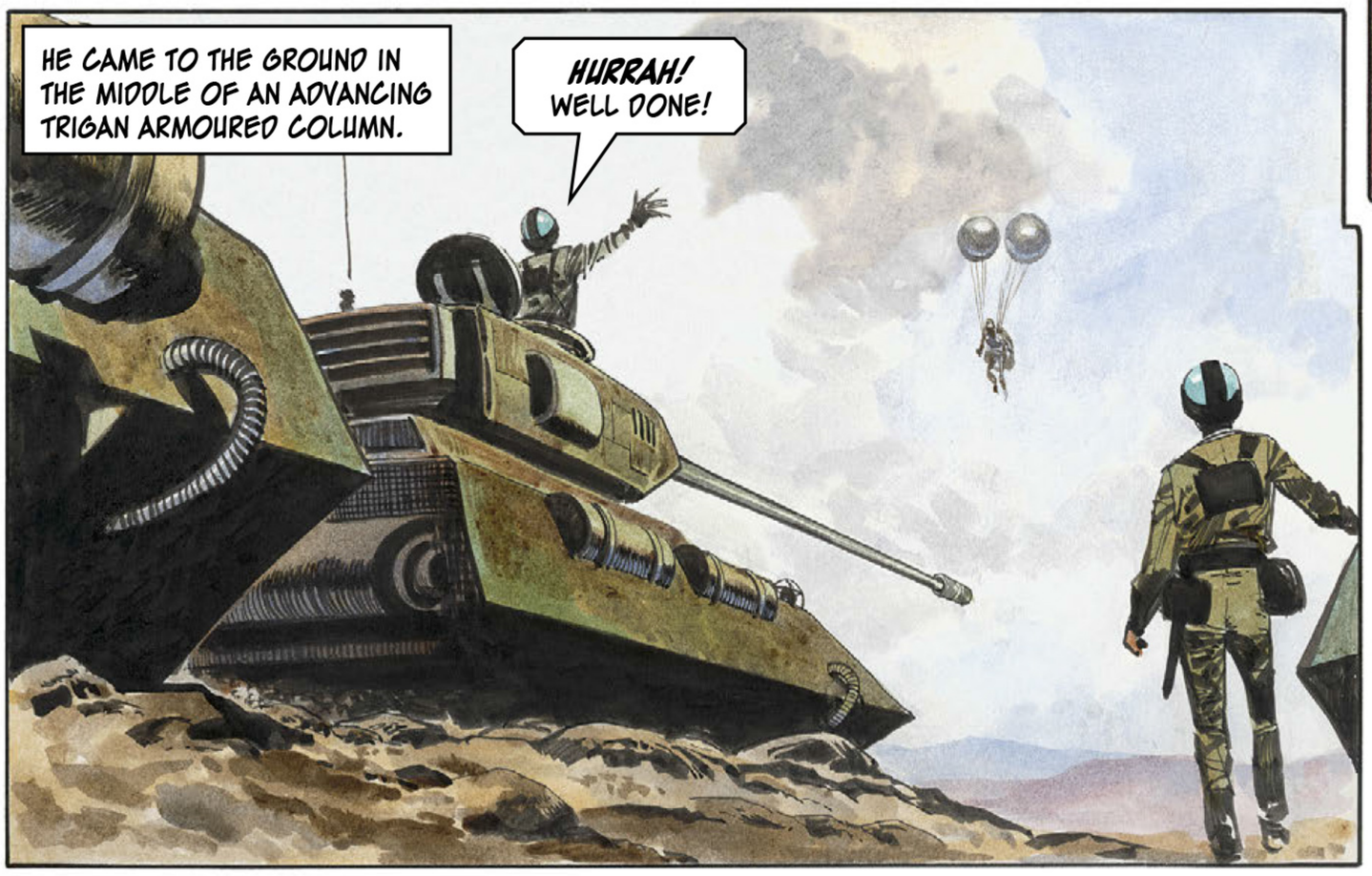

JUST BEYOND THE CATON FRONTIER - IT HAPPENED!
GET READY FOR THE FIGHT OF YOUR LIFE, NILS!
NOW I AM GOING TO PAY FOR MY DECEPTION - WITH MY LIFE!

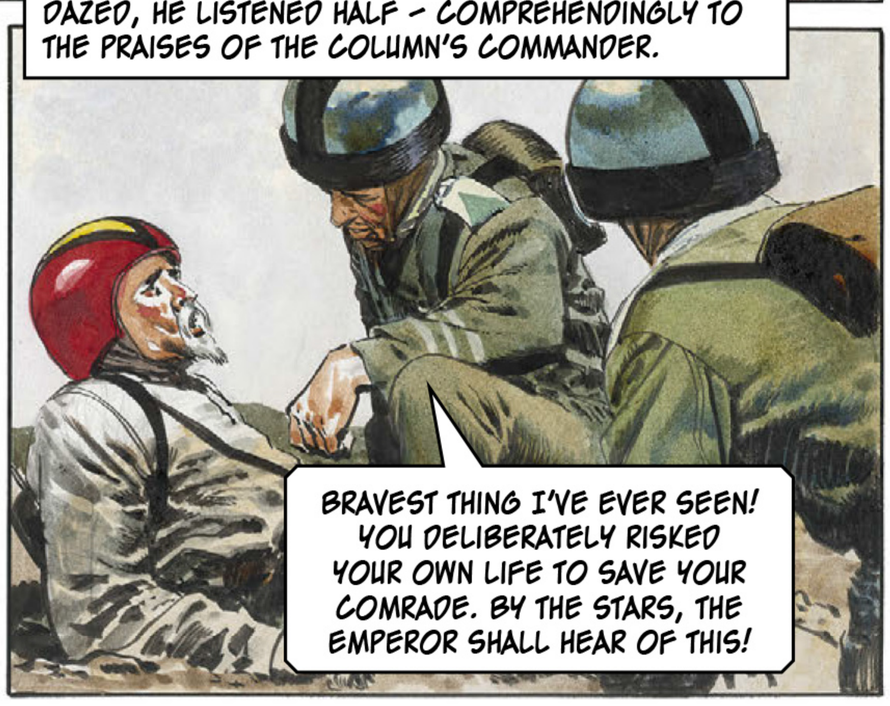

JANNO HIT ONE OF THE ENEMY, BUT WAS IMMEDIATELY THREATENED BY TWO MORE ON HIS TAIL.

MEANWHILE, VOSS'S INSTRUMENT PANEL HAD DISINTEGRATED BEFORE HIM.
AAAAAGH!


HIS CRAFT PLUNGED OUT OF CONTROL – AND SLICED INTO THE ENEMY FIGHTERS THREATENING JANNO!

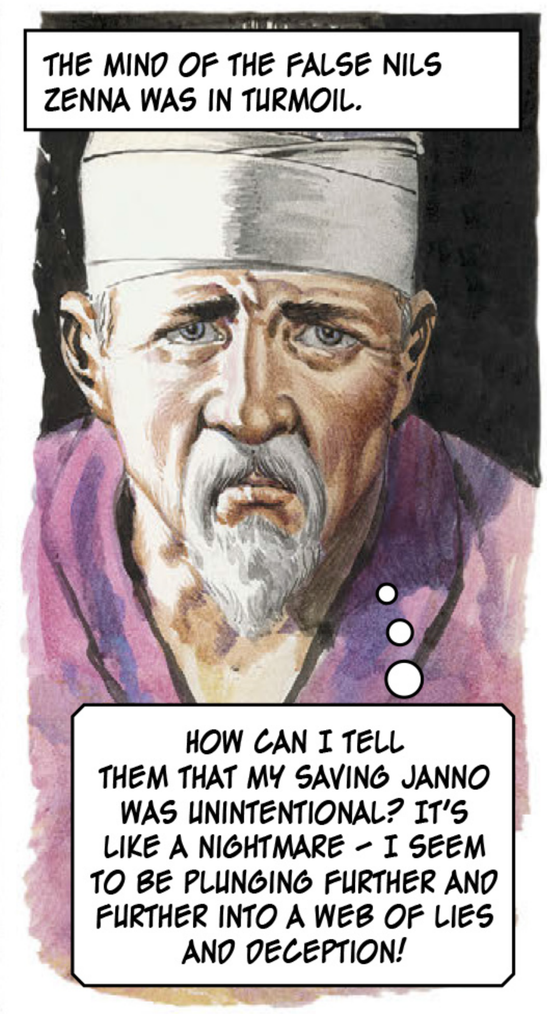

AN INSTANT BEFORE HIS OWN CRAFT BLEW UP, VOSS INSTINCTIVELY PRESSED HIS ESCAPE BUTTON.


HE CAME TO THE GROUND IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ADVANCING TRIGAN ARMOURED COLUMN.
HURRAH! WELL DONE!


DAZED, HE LISTENED HALF – COMPREHENDINGLY TO THE PRAISES OF THE COLUMN'S COMMANDER.
BRAVEST THING I'VE EVER SEEN! YOU DELIBERATELY RISKED YOUR OWN LIFE TO SAVE YOUR COMRADE. BY THE STARS, THE EMPEROR SHALL HEAR OF THIS!

AND SO IT WAS THAT THE IMPOSTER WAS DECORATED BY TRIGO HIMSELF.
THE EMPIRE'S HIGHEST AWARD FOR GALLANTRY IN ACTION!

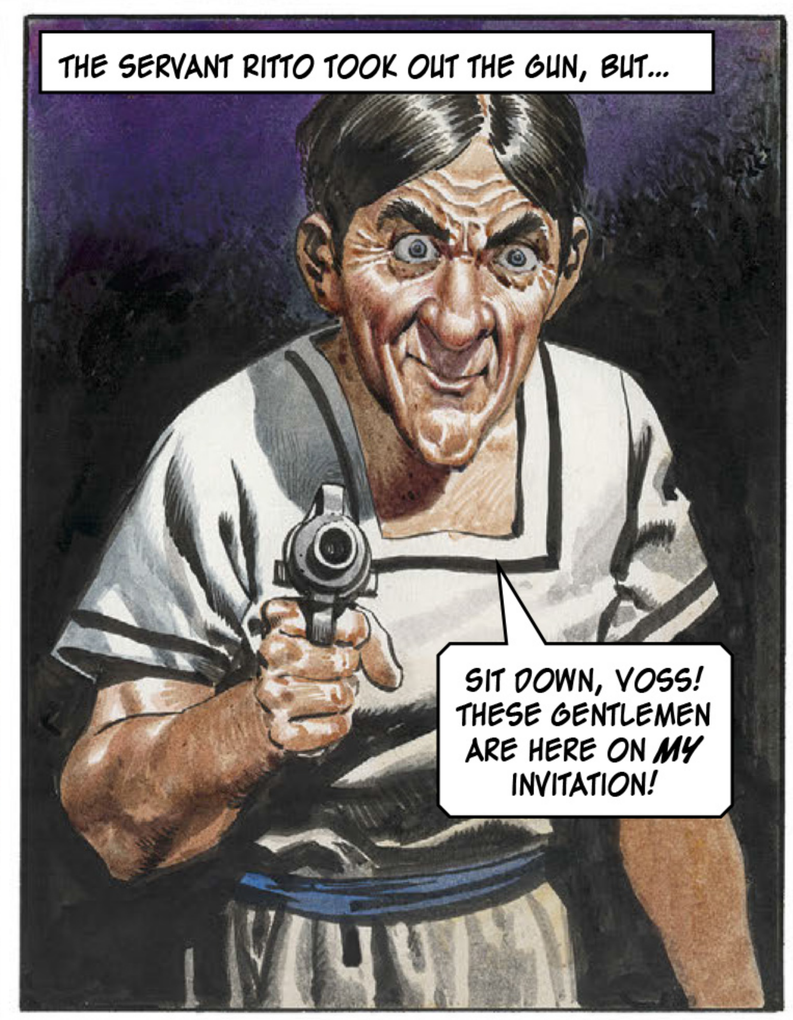
I OWE YOU A LIFE, NILS ZENNA – AND IF IT SHOULD EVER BE NECESSARY I WILL REPAY IT!


THE MIND OF THE FALSE NILS ZENNA WAS IN TURMOIL.
HOW CAN I TELL THEM THAT MY SAVING JANNO WAS UNINTENTIONAL? IT'S LIKE A NIGHTMARE – I SEEM TO BE PLUNGING FURTHER AND FURTHER INTO A WEB OF LIES AND DECEPTION!

ONE NIGHT, A LUNAR MONTH LATER, TWO FIGURES DESCENDED FROM THE SKY ON TO THE VILLA OF NILS ZENNA.

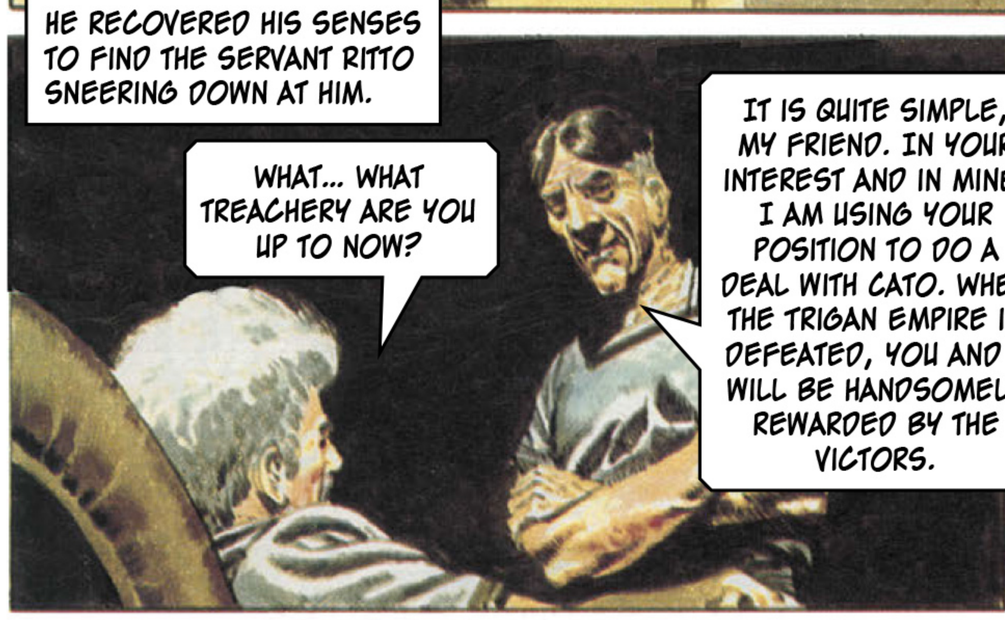
TWO MEN IN THE UNIFORMS OF CATO!
READY?
READY!

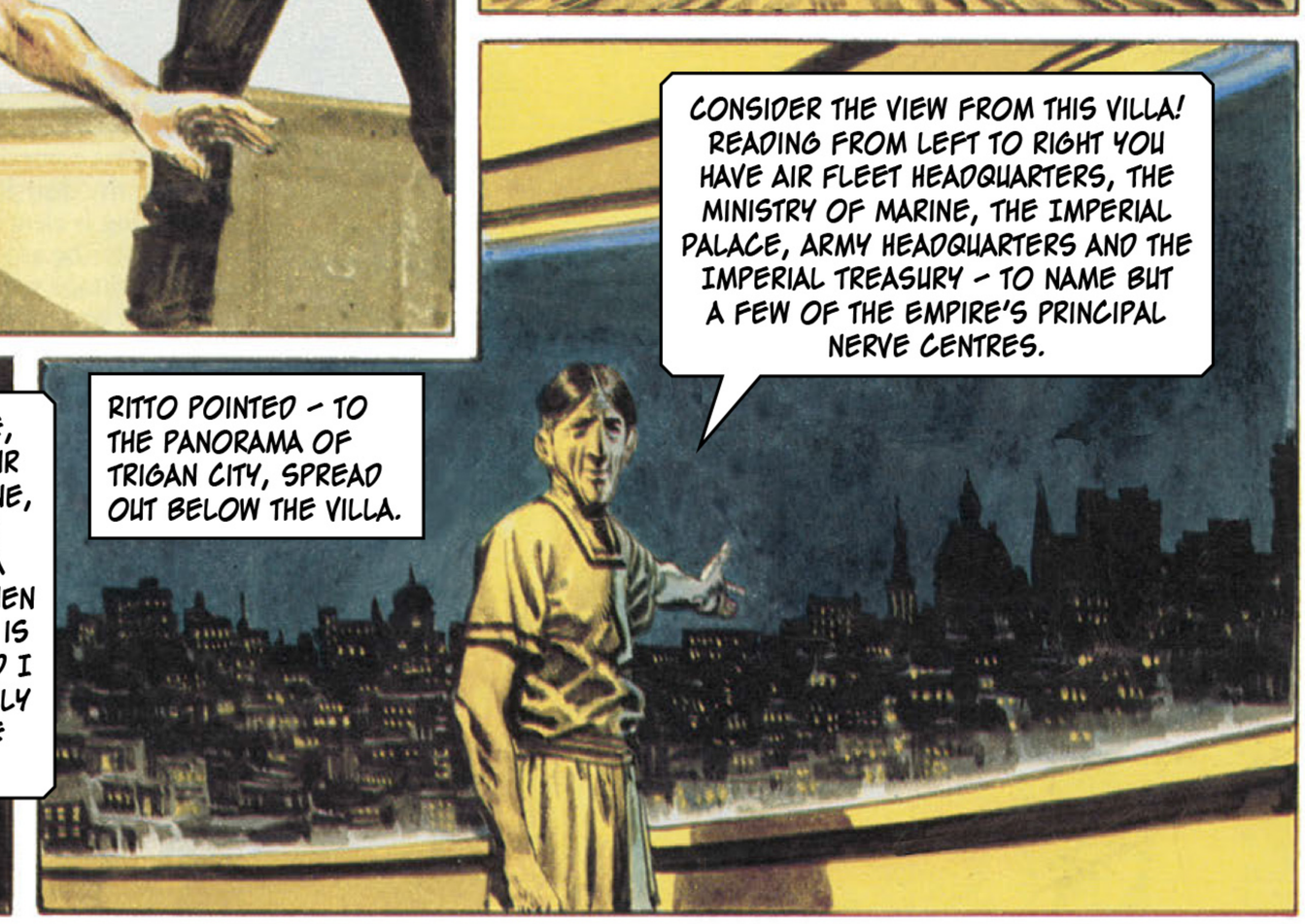
WHEN THEY BURST INTO THE VILLA, VOSS RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY TO THE SIGHT OF THE ENEMY UNIFORMS.
RITTO! MY GUN FROM THAT DRAWER! QUICKLY, MAN!

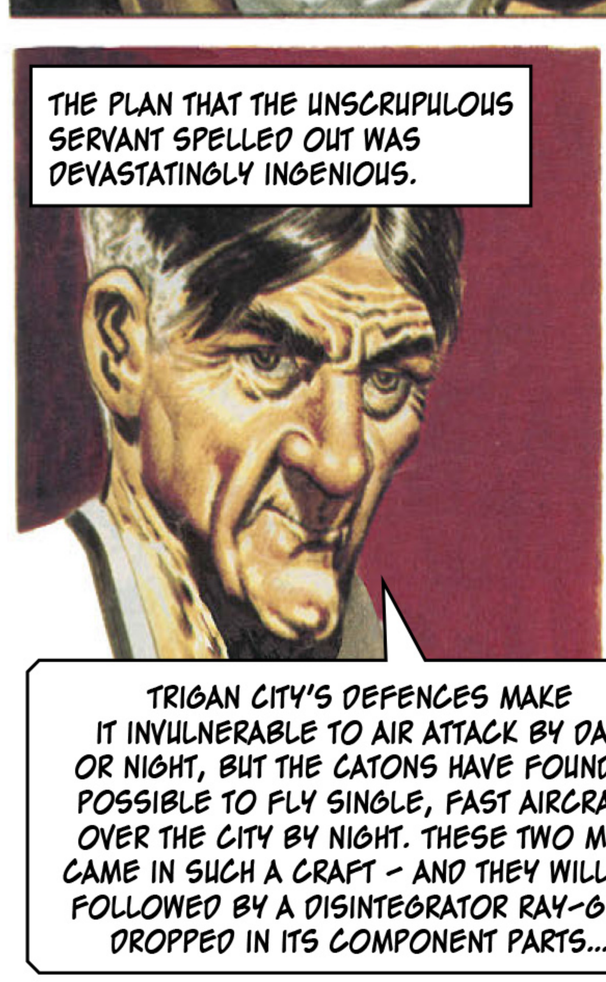

THE SERVANT RITTO TOOK OUT THE GUN, BUT...
SIT DOWN, VOSS! THESE GENTLEMEN ARE HERE ON MY INVITATION!

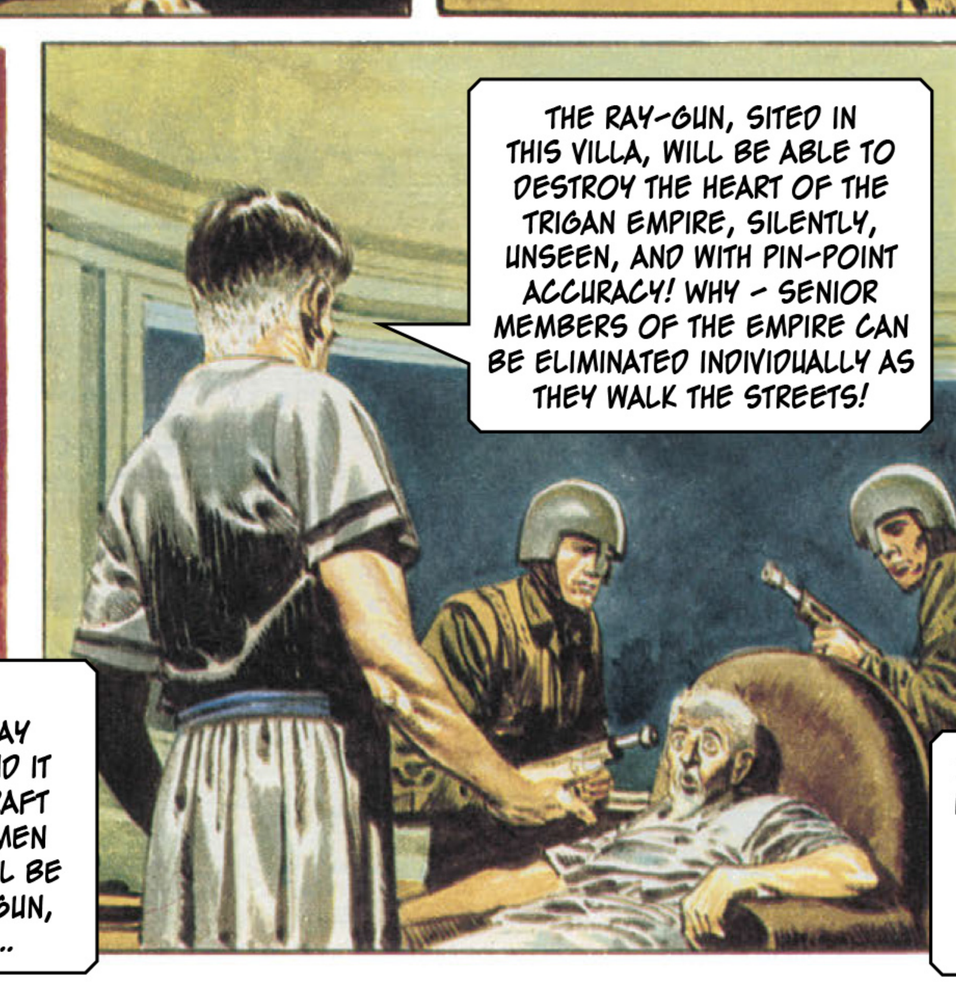
VOSS MADE A DIVE FOR THE DOOR – DUCKING UNDER THE LEVELLED GUNS OF THE CATON SOLDIERS.
STOP HIM! DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY, OR ALL'S LOST!

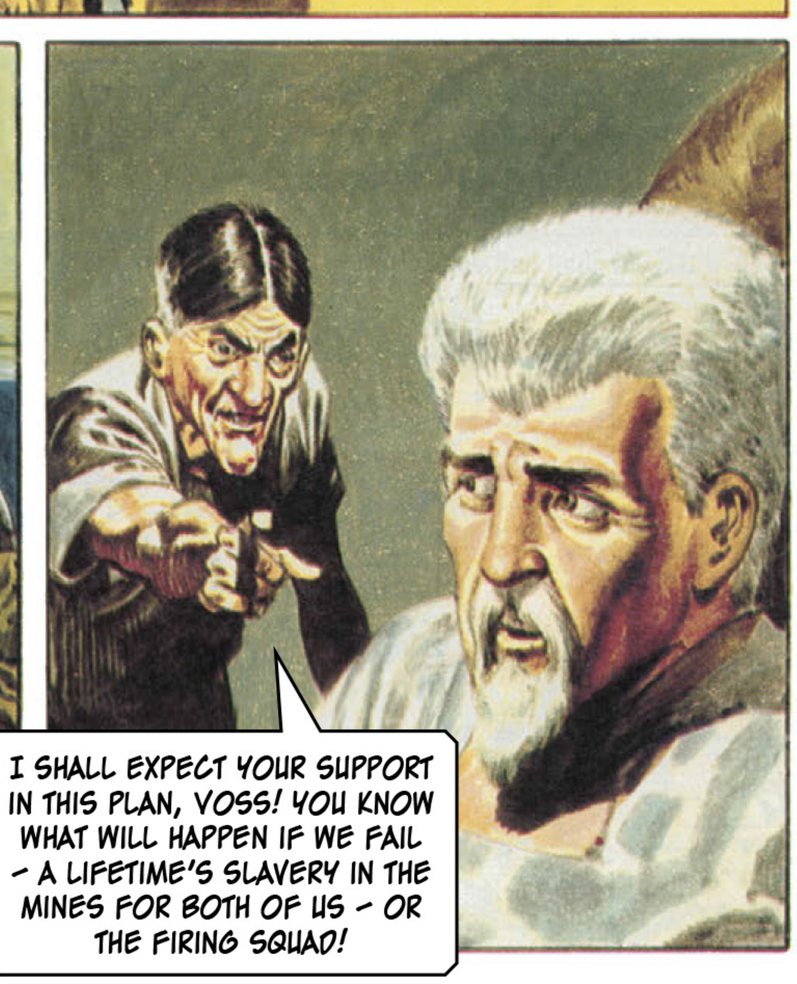
VOSS DID NOT GET AWAY!
UUUUH!


HE RECOVERED HIS SENSES TO FIND THE SERVANT RITTO SNEERING DOWN AT HIM.
WHAT... WHAT TREACHERY ARE YOU UP TO NOW?
IT IS QUITE SIMPLE, MY FRIEND. IN YOUR INTEREST AND IN MINE, I AM USING YOUR POSITION TO DO A DEAL WITH CATO. WHEN THE TRIGAN EMPIRE IS DEFEATED, YOU AND I WILL BE HANDSOMELY REWARDED BY THE VICTORS.

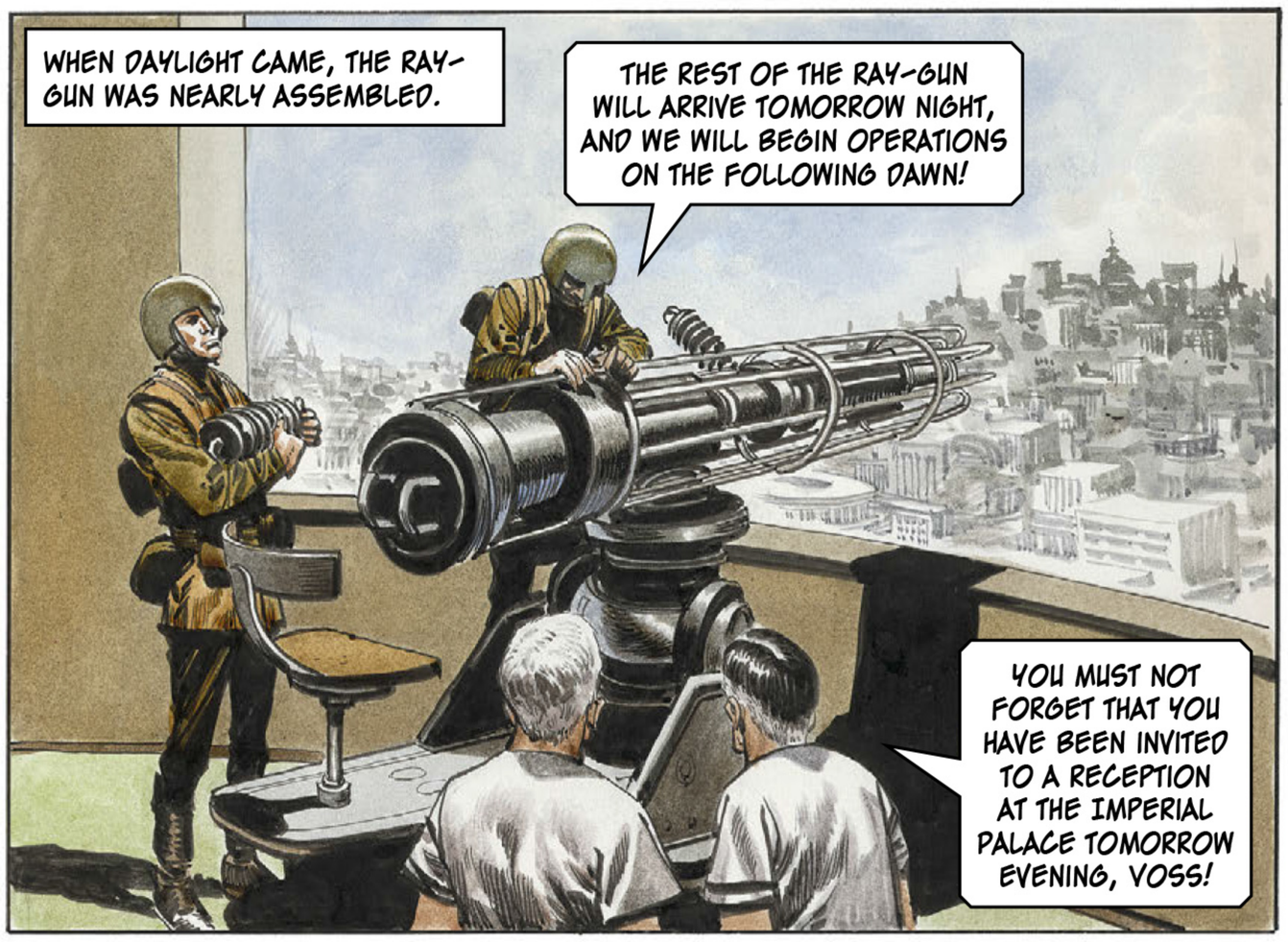

RITTO POINTED – TO THE PANORAMA OF TRIGAN CITY, SPREAD OUT BELOW THE VILLA.
CONSIDER THE VIEW FROM THIS VILLA! READING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT YOU HAVE AIR FLEET HEADQUARTERS, THE MINISTRY OF MARINE, THE IMPERIAL PALACE, ARMY HEADQUARTERS AND THE IMPERIAL TREASURY – TO NAME BUT A FEW OF THE EMPIRE'S PRINCIPAL NERVE CENTRES.

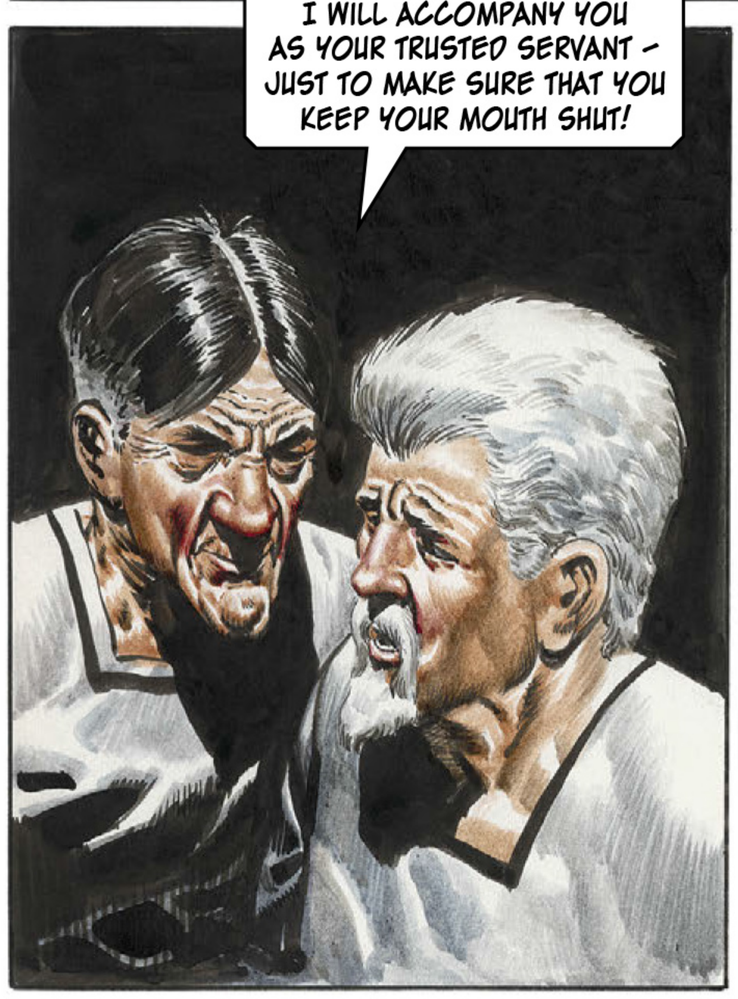

THE PLAN THAT THE UNSCRUPULOUS SERVANT SPELLED OUT WAS DEVASTATINGLY INGENIOUS.
TRIGAN CITY'S DEFENCES MAKE IT INVULNERABLE TO AIR ATTACK BY DAY OR NIGHT, BUT THE CATONS HAVE FOUND IT POSSIBLE TO FLY SINGLE, FAST AIRCRAFT OVER THE CITY BY NIGHT. THESE TWO MEN CAME IN SUCH A CRAFT – AND THEY WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A DISINTEGRATOR RAY-GUN, DROPPED IN ITS COMPONENT PARTS...

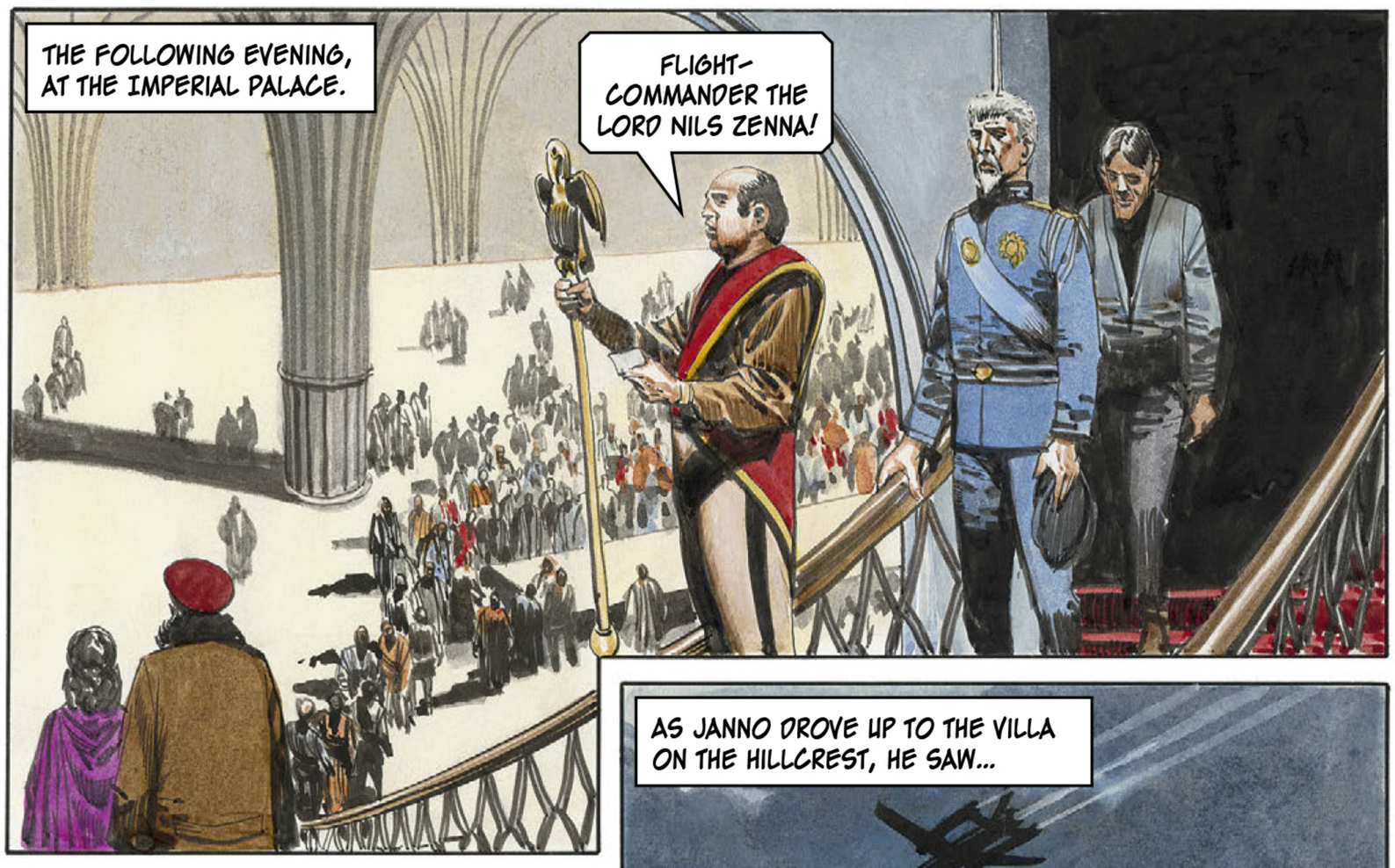

THE RAY-GUN, SITED IN THIS VILLA, WILL BE ABLE TO DESTROY THE HEART OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE, SILENTLY, UNSEEN, AND WITH PIN-POINT ACCURACY! WHY – SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE EMPIRE CAN BE ELIMINATED INDIVIDUALLY AS THEY WALK THE STREETS!


I SHALL EXPECT YOUR SUPPORT IN THIS PLAN, VOSS! YOU KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF WE FAIL – A LIFETIME'S SLAVERY IN THE MINES FOR BOTH OF US – OR THE FIRING SQUAD!

LATER THAT NIGHT...
THIS WILL BE THE LAST DROP TONIGHT.


WHEN DAYLIGHT CAME, THE RAY-GUN WAS NEARLY ASSEMBLED.
THE REST OF THE RAY-GUN WILL ARRIVE TOMORROW NIGHT, AND WE WILL BEGIN OPERATIONS ON THE FOLLOWING DAWN!
YOU MUST NOT FORGET THAT YOU HAVE BEEN INVITED TO A RECEPTION AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE TOMORROW EVENING, VOSS!

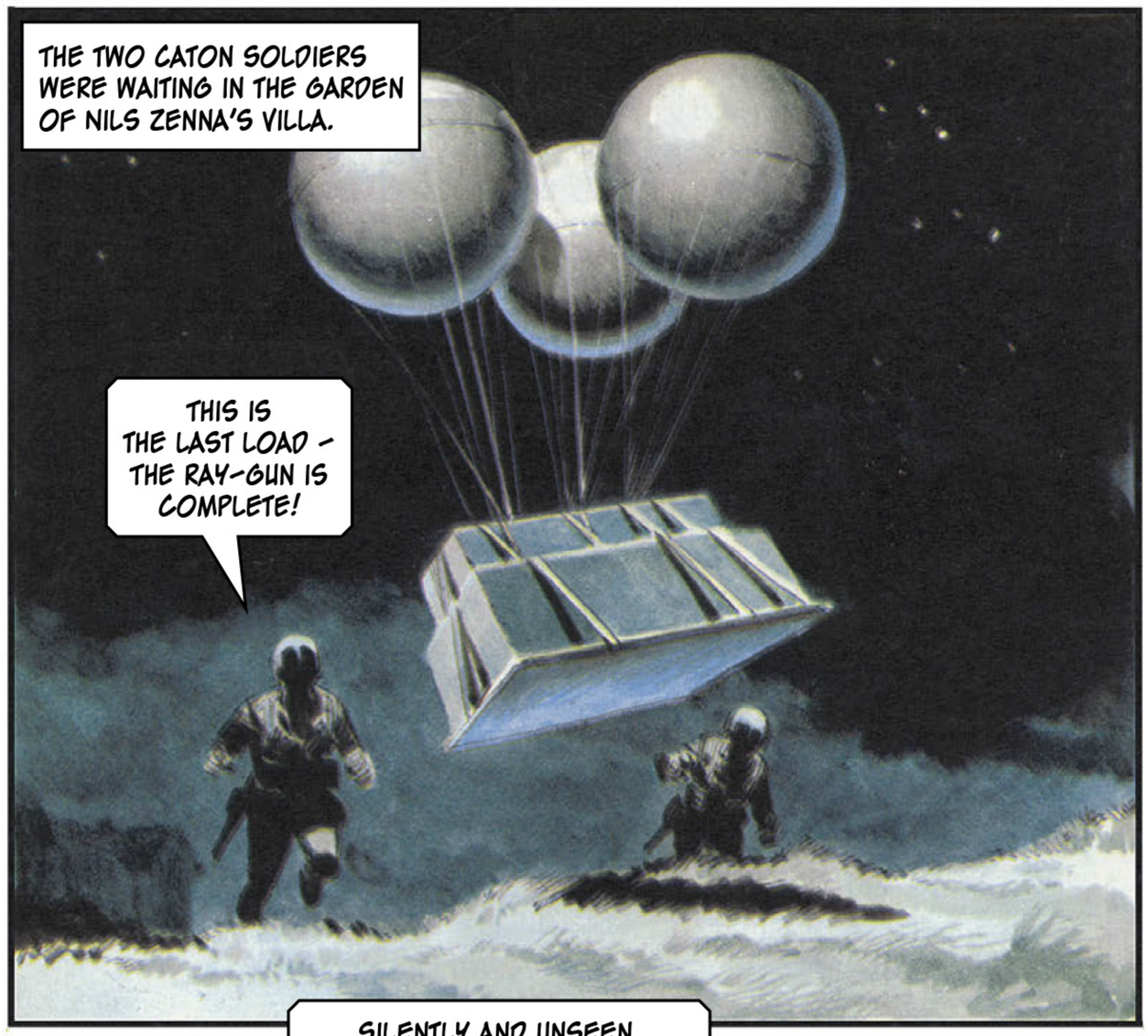

I WILL ACCOMPANY YOU AS YOUR TRUSTED SERVANT – JUST TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT!

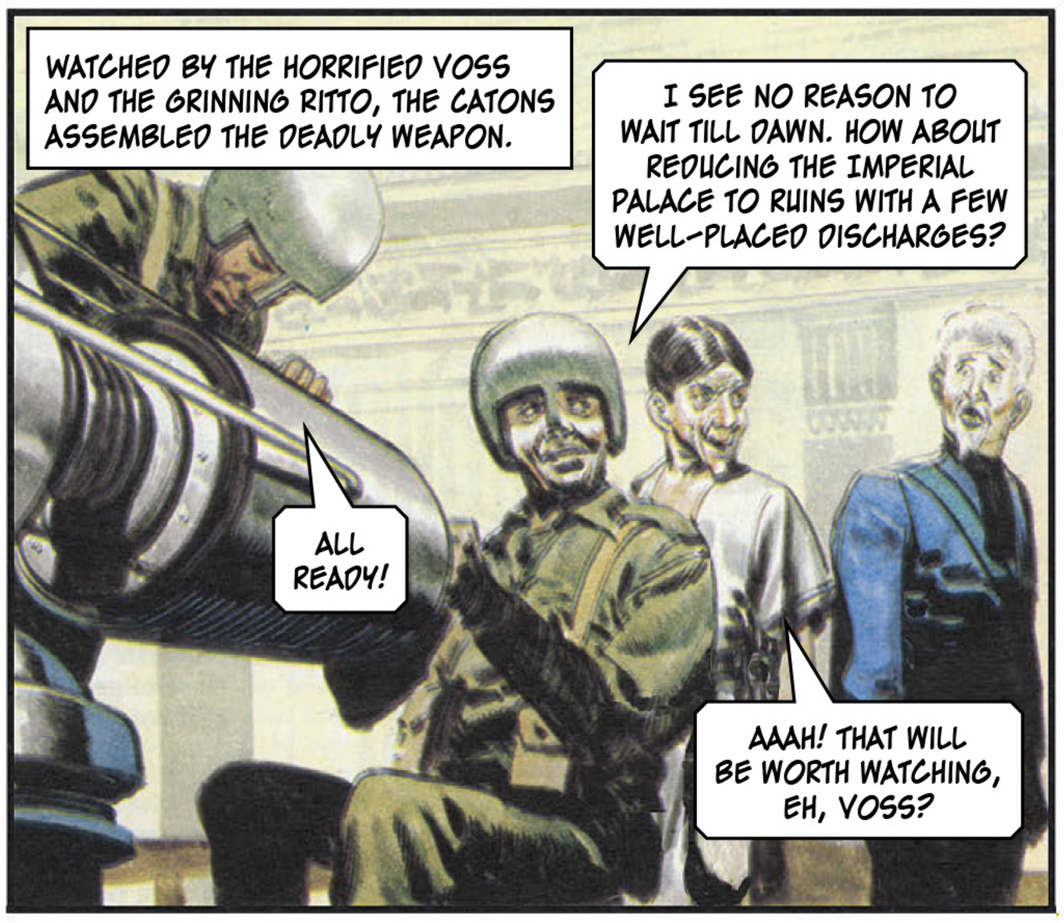

THE FOLLOWING EVENING, AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE.
FLIGHT-COMMANDER THE LORD NILS ZENNA!

JANNO NOTICED HIS COMRADE'S PENSIVE MOOD.
I THINK WE SHALL SOON MAKE A SATISFACTORY PEACE WITH CATO, DON'T YOU NILS ZENNA?
THE FELLOW'S NOT LISTENING TO A WORD I SAY!

LATER, WHEN THE FALSE NILS ZENNA AND HIS SERVANT HAD DEPARTED...
DID YOU INVITE NILS ZENNA TO JOIN US FOR THE ZARGOT HUNT TOMORROW, JANNO?
NO, UNCLE, I FORGOT. CONFOUND IT. I WILL CALL ROUND AT HIS VILLA.

AS JANNO DROVE UP TO THE VILLA ON THE HILLCREST, HE SAW...
BY ALL THE STARS! – WHAT'S GOING ON THERE?


THE TWO CATON SOLDIERS WERE WAITING IN THE GARDEN OF NILS ZENNA'S VILLA.
THIS IS THE LAST LOAD – THE RAY-GUN IS COMPLETE!


WATCHED BY THE HORRIFIED VOSS AND THE GRINNING RITTO, THE CATONS ASSEMBLED THE DEADLY WEAPON.
I SEE NO REASON TO WAIT TILL DAWN. HOW ABOUT REDUCING THE IMPERIAL PALACE TO RUINS WITH A FEW WELL-PLACED DISCHARGES?
ALL READY!
AAAH! THAT WILL BE WORTH WATCHING, EH, VOSS?

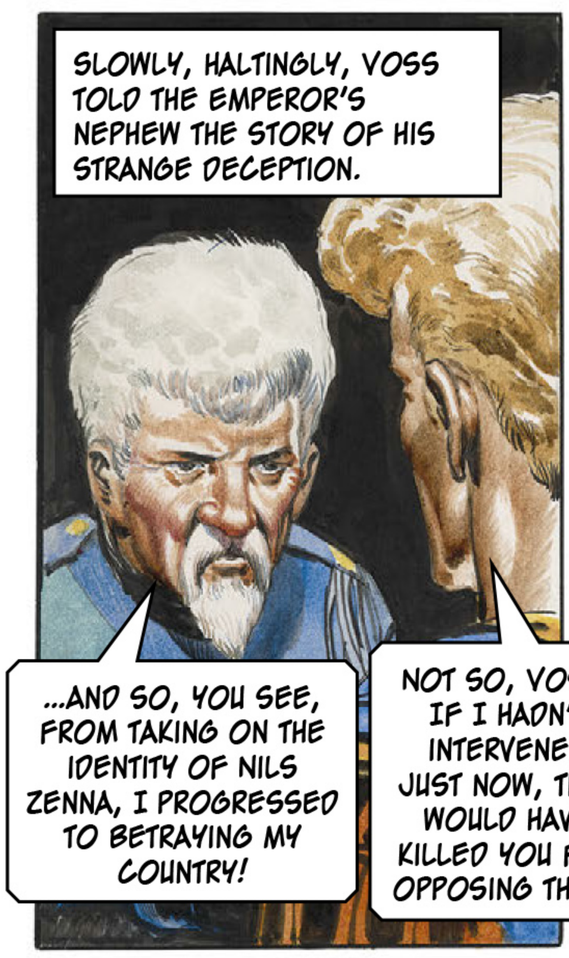
SILENTLY AND UNSEEN, WE WILL DISPOSE OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, THE EMPEROR TRIGO! – HAH!

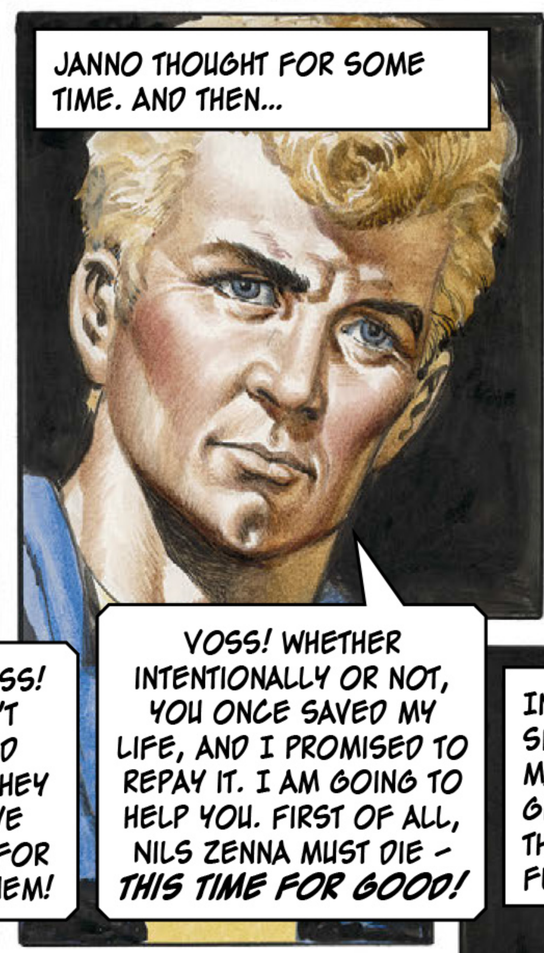
IN THAT INSTANT, VOSS ACTED!
AAAAAH! STOP HIM!

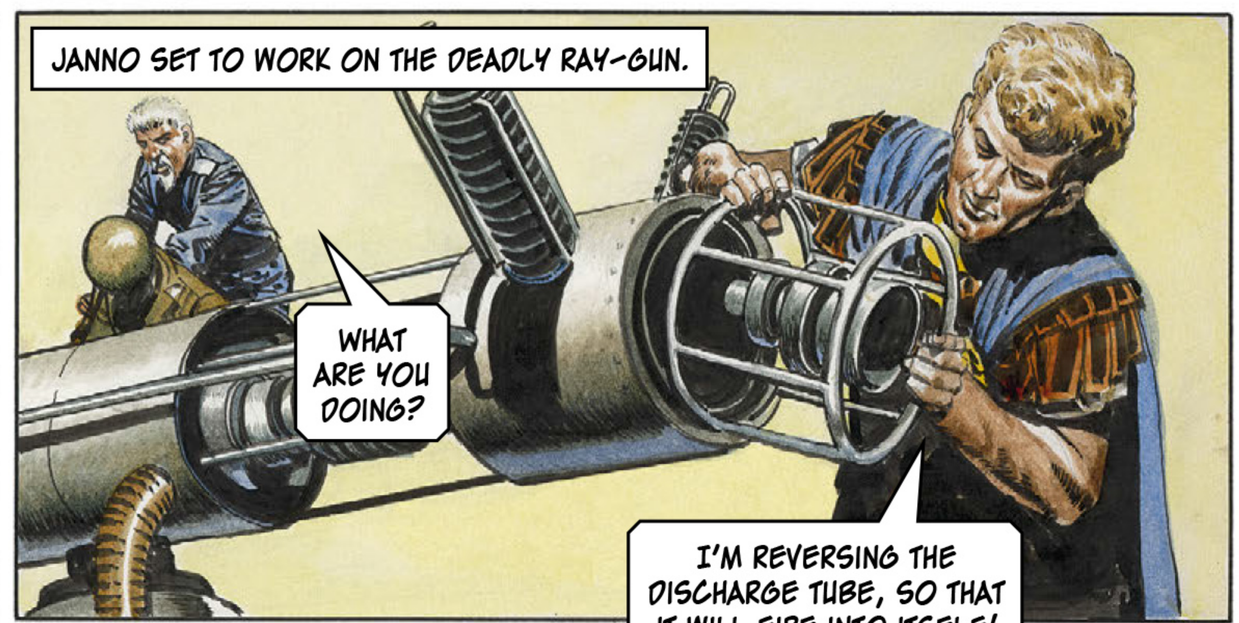
...BUT WAS STRUCK DOWN.
BUT THERE WAS AN INTRUDER IN THE VILLA – NONE OTHER THAN JANNO, WHO HAD SEEN AND HEARD ALL.
YOU ANIMALS!
LOOK OUT! – IT'S JANNO!

YOUNG JANNO SOON SETTLED HIS TWO OPPONENTS!
AAAAGH!

SOME TIME PASSED BEFORE THE IMPOSTER WHO HAD CALLED HIMSELF NILS ZENNA OPENED HIS EYES.
I WANT TO KNOW WHY YOUR SERVANT ADDRESSED YOU AS "VOSS" INSTEAD OF "MASTER" OR "NILS ZENNA". IN FACT, I WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING - SO START TALKING!

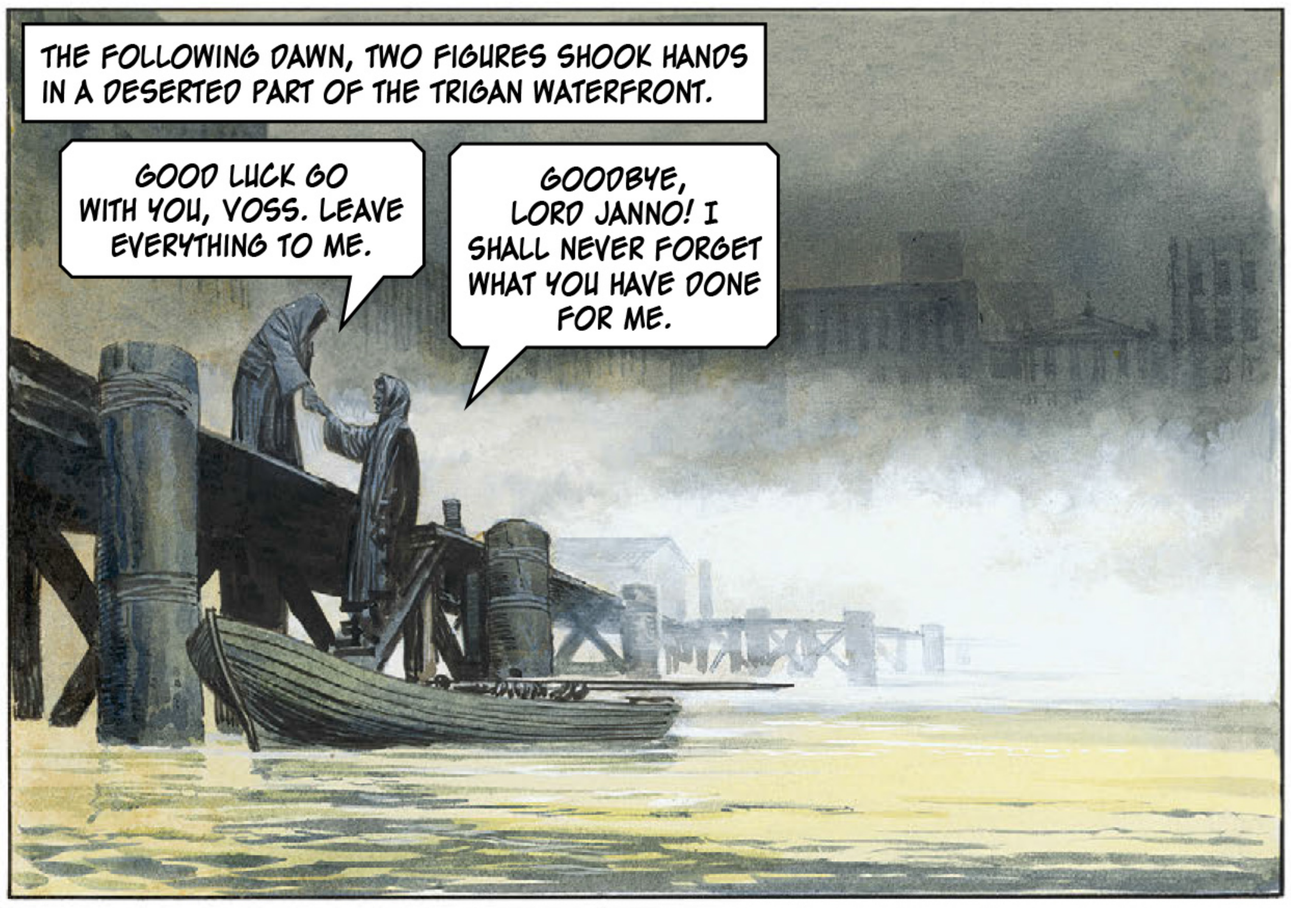

SLOWLY, HALTINGLY, VOSS TOLD THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW THE STORY OF HIS STRANGE DECEPTION.
...AND SO, YOU SEE, FROM TAKING ON THE IDENTITY OF NILS ZENNA, I PROGRESSED TO BETRAYING MY COUNTRY!
NOT SO, VOSS! IF I HADN'T INTERVENED JUST NOW, THEY WOULD HAVE KILLED YOU FOR OPPOSING THEM!


JANNO THOUGHT FOR SOME TIME. AND THEN...
VOSS! WHETHER INTENTIONALLY OR NOT, YOU ONCE SAVED MY LIFE, AND I PROMISED TO REPAY IT. I AM GOING TO HELP YOU. FIRST OF ALL, NILS ZENNA MUST DIE - THIS TIME FOR GOOD!


JANNO SET TO WORK ON THE DEADLY RAY-GUN.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I'M REVERSING THE DISCHARGE TUBE, SO THAT IT WILL FIRE INTO ITSELF! GET THOSE MEN OUT OF HERE QUICKLY!

MOMENTS LATER, THE TWO MEN AND THEIR UNCONSCIOUS PRISONERS WERE CROUCHED BELOW THE VILLA.
WHAT WILL HAPPEN?
A DELAY FUSE WILL FIRE THE GUN - THE GUN WILL BLOW ITSELF UP - AND EVERYTHING WITH IT, INCLUDING NILS ZENNA!

IN YEARS TO COME, THE CITIZENS OF TRIGAN SPOKE OF THE NIGHT THAT NILS ZENNA'S MAGNIFICENT VILLA DISINTEGRATED IN A GREAT THUNDERCLAP OF SOUND THAT ROCKED THE VERY FOUNDATIONS OF THE CITY, AND A FLASH THAT TURNED NIGHT INTO DAY!

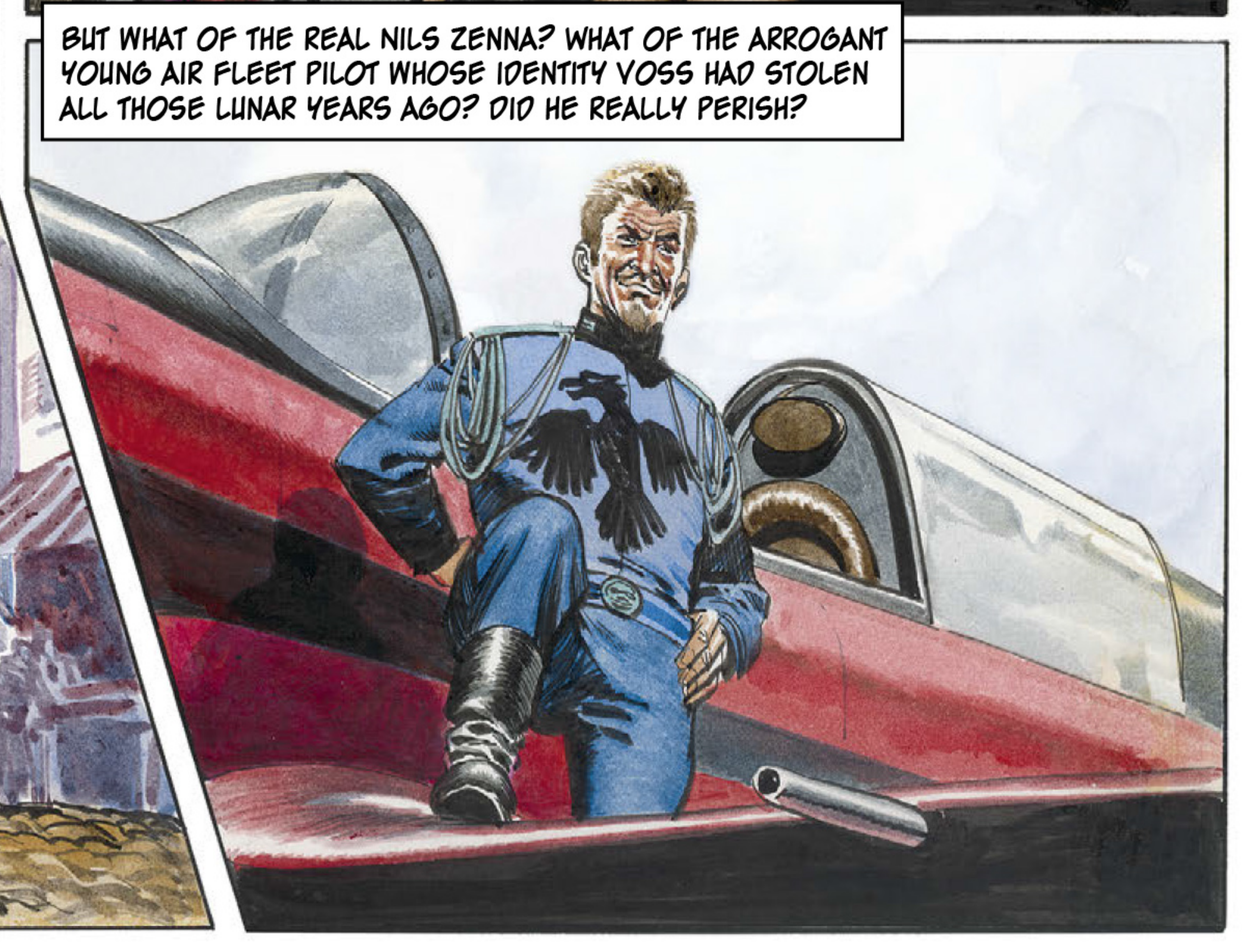

THE FOLLOWING DAWN, TWO FIGURES SHOOK HANDS IN A DESERTED PART OF THE TRIGAN WATERFRONT.
GOOD LUCK GO WITH YOU, VOSS. LEAVE EVERYTHING TO ME.
GOODBYE, LORD JANNO! I SHALL NEVER FORGET WHAT YOU HAVE DONE FOR ME.

A SENSATIONAL TREASON CASE FOLLOWED, IN WHICH JANNO GAVE EVIDENCE AGAINST THE THREE ACCUSED.
I SAW NILS ZENNA STRUGGLING WITH HIS TREACHEROUS SERVANT AND THE TWO CATONS.

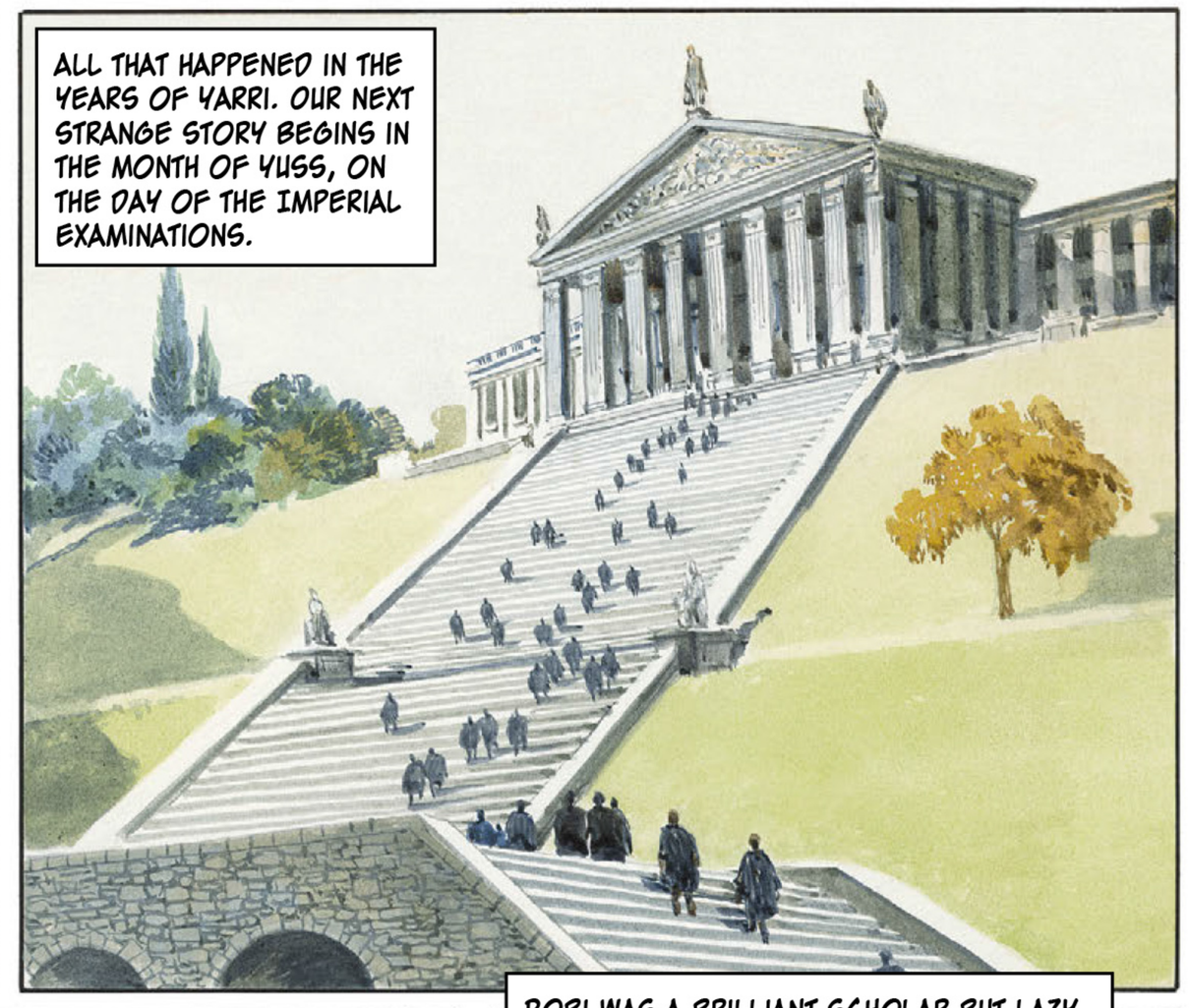
THE COURT FOUND THAT NILS ZENNA HAD PERISHED FOR THE EMPIRE IN THE RUINS OF HIS VILLA. BY IMPERIAL DECREE, A STATUE WAS ERECTED TO HIS MEMORY.

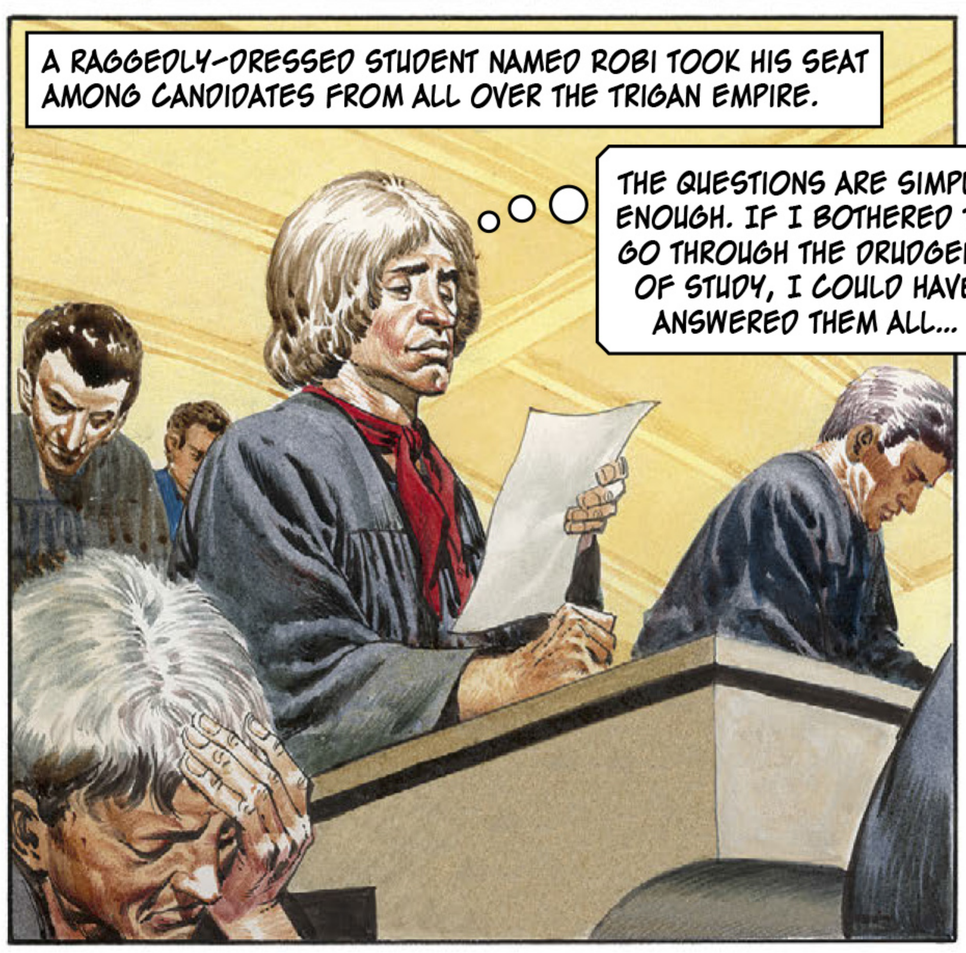
THE SCOUNDRELLY RITTO SPENT THE REST OF HIS DAYS – A PUZZLED MAN – IN THE DREADED PUNISHMENT MINES.
WHAT WENT WRONG? *WHAT* WENT WRONG?

VOSS LIVED OUT HIS LIFE IN A REMOTE PROVINCE OF THE EMPIRE. HAPPY WITH A LARGE FAMILY, HE FOLLOWED HIS FATHER'S OLD TRADE AS A TAILOR.


BUT WHAT OF THE REAL NILS ZENNA? WHAT OF THE ARROGANT YOUNG AIR FLEET PILOT WHOSE IDENTITY VOSS HAD STOLEN ALL THOSE LUNAR YEARS AGO? DID HE REALLY PERISH?

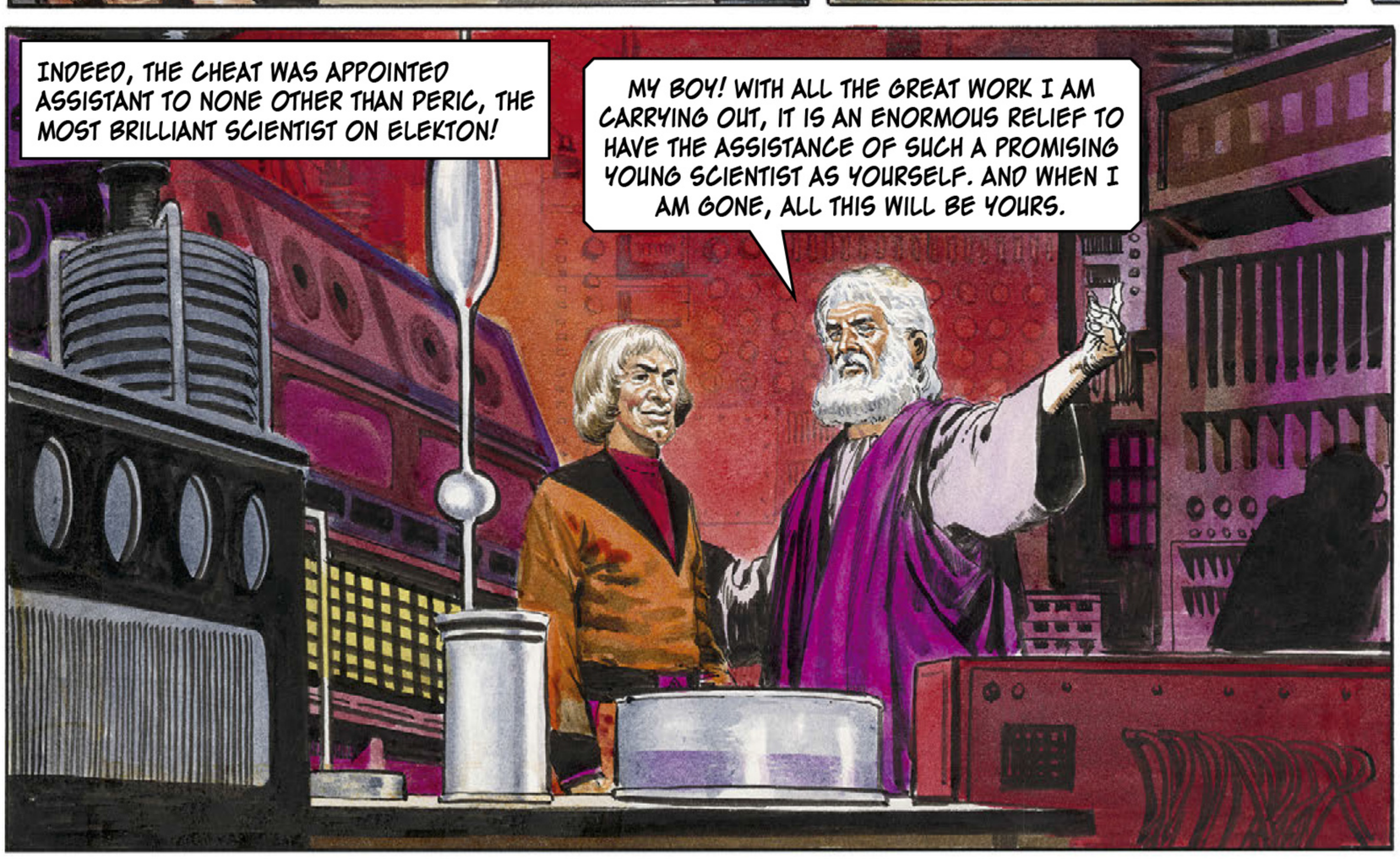
IN THE TRACKLESS HEART OF THE DAVELI JUNGLE, IT IS SAID, DWELLS A WISE MAN WHOSE LIFE IS DEVOTED TO GOOD WORKS AND MEDITATION. HE MAY BE THE MISSING PILOT – BUT HE IS SAYING NOTHING!


ALL THAT HAPPENED IN THE YEARS OF YARRI. OUR NEXT STRANGE STORY BEGINS IN THE MONTH OF YUSS, ON THE DAY OF THE IMPERIAL EXAMINATIONS.


A RAGGEDLY-DRESSED STUDENT NAMED ROBI TOOK HIS SEAT AMONG CANDIDATES FROM ALL OVER THE TRIGAN EMPIRE.
THE QUESTIONS ARE SIMPLE ENOUGH. IF I BOTHERED TO GO THROUGH THE DRUDGERY OF STUDY, I COULD HAVE ANSWERED THEM ALL...

...AS IT IS, I SHALL HAVE TO RELY ON THIS TABLET, WHICH CONTAINS ALL THE INFORMATION I NEED!

ROBI WAS A BRILLIANT SCHOLAR BUT LAZY. HE CHEATED, AND PASSED OUT TOP OF THE IMPERIAL EXAMINATIONS.
AT THE HEAD OF THE LIST IS... ROBI!
HA! – THAT SHOULD GET ME A TOP JOB IN THE IMPERIAL SERVICE!


INDEED, THE CHEAT WAS APPOINTED ASSISTANT TO NONE OTHER THAN PERIC, THE MOST BRILLIANT SCIENTIST ON ELEKTON!
MY BOY! WITH ALL THE GREAT WORK I AM CARRYING OUT, IT IS AN ENORMOUS RELIEF TO HAVE THE ASSISTANCE OF SUCH A PROMISING YOUNG SCIENTIST AS YOURSELF. AND WHEN I AM GONE, ALL THIS WILL BE YOURS.

POMPOUS OLD WINDBAG! DOES HE THINK I'M GOING TO WAIT AROUND TO STEP INTO HIS SHOES! NOT ME! IF I HAVEN'T LIED AND CHEATED MY WAY INTO FAME AND FORTUNE WITHIN THE NEXT LUNAR YEAR, MY NAME ISN'T ROBI!

XXIX

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

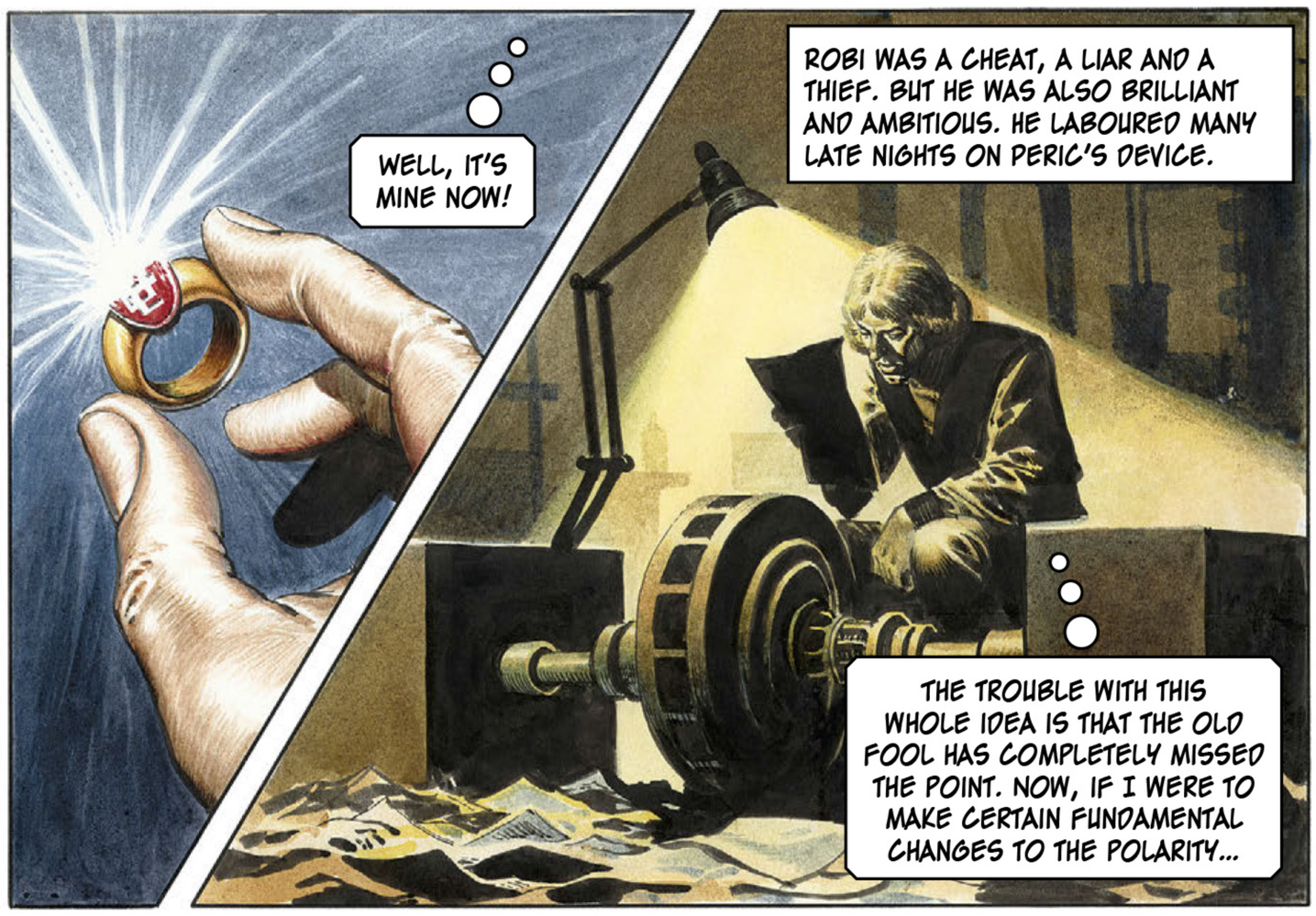
THE DUPLICATOR

Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 497-505

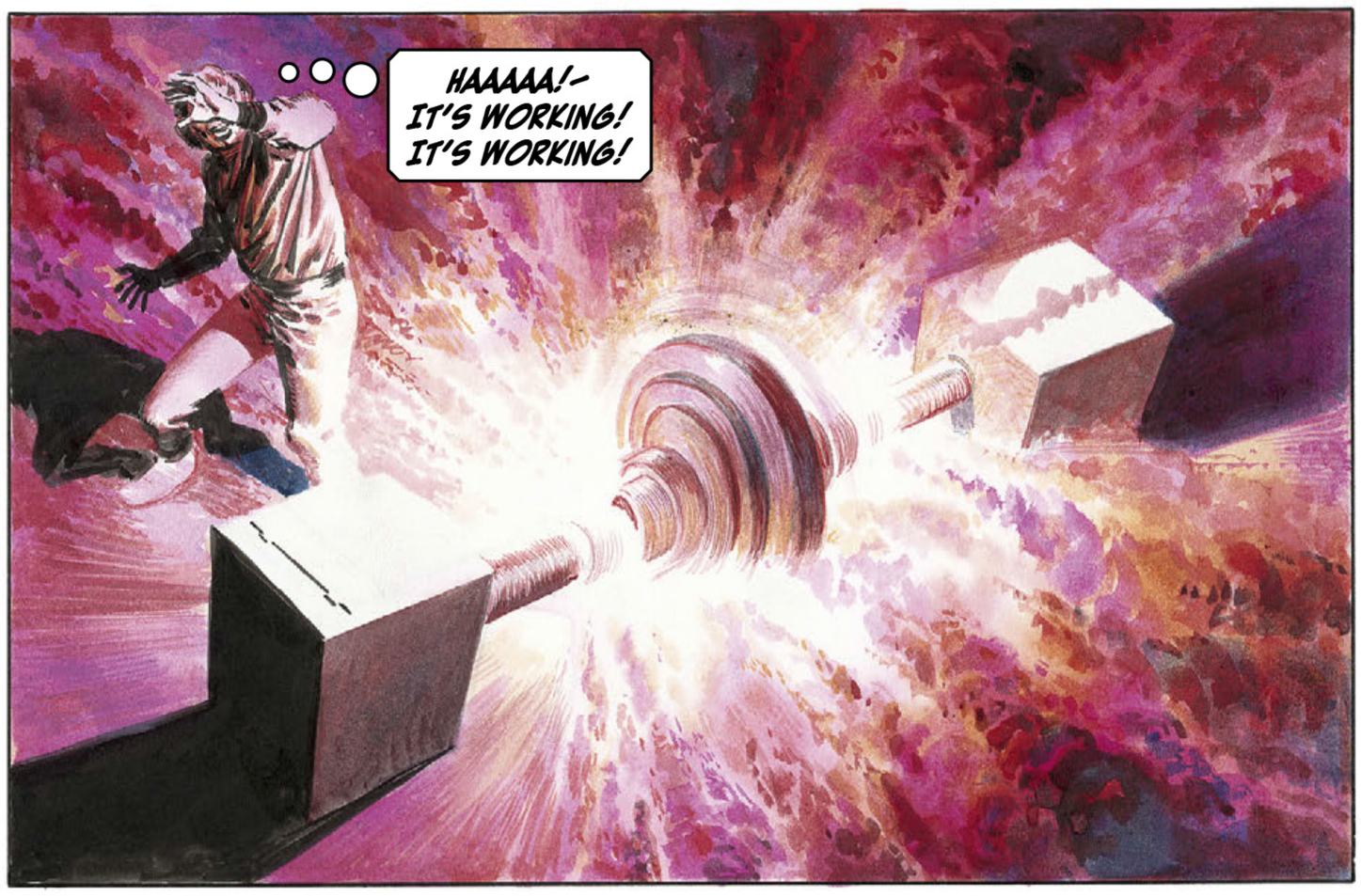
17th July 1971 – 18th September 1971

ONE DAY, WHILE PRACTISING LOW-FLYING, JANNO THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW FELT HIS CRAFT GIVE A CONVULSIVE SHUDDER.
BY THE STARS! THE ENGINE'S OVERHEATED! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE IT BLOWS UP!
HE USED THE ESCAPE DEVICE AT SCARCELY MORE THAN ZERO FEET.
UUUUUUUH!
JANNO WAS LUCKY. HE SURVIVED THE CRASH WITH NOTHING WORSE THAN A BROKEN LEG, WHICH WAS TREATED BY ELEKTON'S TOP SCIENTIST PERIC.
YES, MASTER.
I HAVE JOINED THE ENDS OF THE BONE. YOU MAY COMMENCE TO RETURN THE PATIENT TO CONSCIOUSNESS, ROBI.
LATER, DURING HIS CONVALESCENCE, JANNO VISITED PERIC AT HIS LABORATORY.
THIS IS MY NEW ASSISTANT. HIS NAME IS ROBI, AND HE EARNED THE DISTINCTION OF PASSING OUT TOP OF THE IMPERIAL EXAMINATIONS. I AM VERY LUCKY TO HAVE HIM.
I CAN SEE THAT YOU ARE GOING TO SUCCEED PERIC AS THE GREATEST SCIENTIST ON ELEKTON, ROBI.
YOU ARE VERY KIND, LORD JANNO.
AND HOW ARE THINGS WITH YOU, PERIC? WORKING ON ANY EXCITING EXPERIMENTS? MMM – THIS LOOKS AN INTERESTING PIECE OF APPARATUS. WHAT IS IT?
IT IS THE DESPAIR OF MY LIFE. I HAVE BEEN WORKING ON IT FOR MANY YEARS, AND HAVE COME SO CLOSE TO SUCCESS. BUT...
IT IS A DEVICE TO TRANSMIT AN OBJECT FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER BY BREAKING IT UP INTO COMPONENT ATOM PARTICLES. I CAN MOVE A METAL TUBE FROM THE LEFT TO THE RIGHT-HAND COMPARTMENT... BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, IT ARRIVES THERE AS A PILE OF METALLIC DUST!
MASTER! I WOULD COUNT IT AN HONOUR TO BE ALLOWED TO WORK ON THE DEVICE – IN MY OWN TIME, OF COURSE!
CERTAINLY YOU CAN, BOY! A YOUNG, FRESH MIND IS JUST WHAT'S NEEDED TO CRACK THIS PROBLEM!

LATER THAT DAY, WHILE CLEANING UP THE LABORATORY, PERIC'S ASSISTANT FOUND...
WHAT'S THIS? – A SIGNET RING! IT'S THE ONE THE EMPEROR'S FINE NEPHEW WAS WEARING WHEN HE CAME HERE. HE MUST HAVE DROPPED IT.


WELL, IT'S MINE NOW!
ROBI WAS A CHEAT, A LIAR AND A THIEF. BUT HE WAS ALSO BRILLIANT AND AMBITIOUS. HE LABOURED MANY LATE NIGHTS ON PERIC'S DEVICE.
THE TROUBLE WITH THIS WHOLE IDEA IS THAT THE OLD FOOL HAS COMPLETELY MISSED THE POINT. NOW, IF I WERE TO MAKE CERTAIN FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES TO THE POLARITY...

ONE NIGHT...
NOW TO SEE IF IT WORKS! FIRST, WE TAKE THIS RING THAT FORMERLY BELONGED TO THE NOBLE LORD JANNO, AND PLACE THIS UNIQUE AND PRECIOUS OBJECT IN THE LEFT-HAND COMPARTMENT...


HAAAAA!– IT'S WORKING! IT'S WORKING!

THIS IS NOT A DEVICE FOR TRANSMITTING MATTER BUT FOR DUPLICATING MATTER! FROM THE LEFT-HAND COMPARTMENT WE TAKE LORD JANNO'S RING – AND FROM THE RIGHT, WE TAKE AN EXACT DUPLICATE!

THIS DEVICE IS GOING TO MAKE ME THE RICHEST AND MOST POWERFUL MAN ON ELEKTON!

IT HAPPENED IN A DARK ALLEYWAY IN A ROUGH QUARTER OF TRIGAN CITY. A FIGURE LEAPT OUT AT A PASSER-BY, AND A HEAVY CUDGEL WAS RAISED FOR A MERCILESS BLOW.

BUT THE BLOW NEVER FELL!

UUUUH!

HMMMM! WHAT HAVE I CAUGHT? – A SNEAK-THIEF OF THE WORST AND MOST CONTEMPTIBLE TYPE. BUT HE WILL SERVE MY PURPOSE.

LATER, THE BRIGAND RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS.

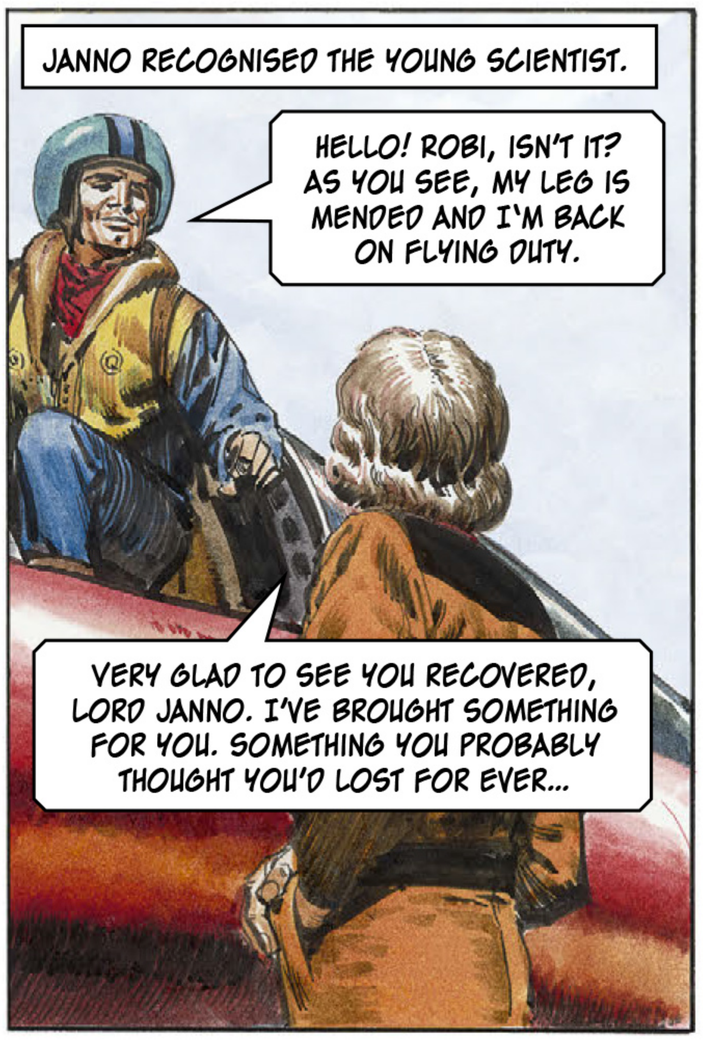
AAAAAH! WHERE AM I? DON'T HURT ME, MASTER! I – I MEANT NO HARM, I SWEAR IT!

YOU MEANT THE WORST POSSIBLE HARM, YOU RASCAL – BUT I AM WILLING TO OVERLOOK IT.

IN FACT, I WILL DO BETTER THAN THAT – I WILL MAKE YOU THE RICHEST ROGUE IN TRIGAN CITY – ***IF YOU OBEY ME WITHOUT QUESTION!***

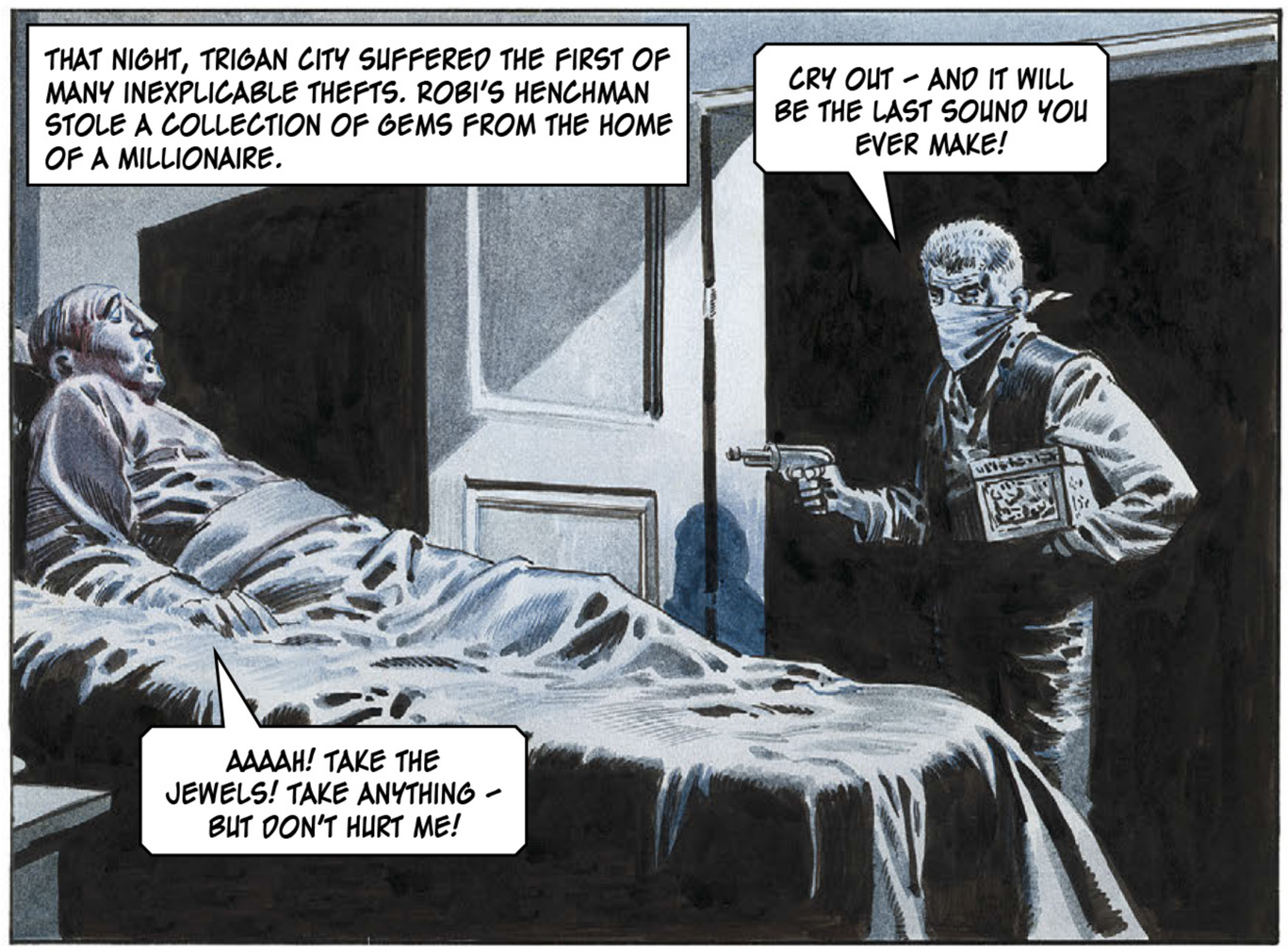
THE FOLLOWING MORNING, ROBI WENT TO AIR FLEET HEADQUARTERS. AS ASSISTANT TO ELEKTON'S TOP SCIENTIST HE CARRIED A PASS THAT ADMITTED HIM TO THE AIR STRIP.

HERE COMES JANNO NOW. I'LL SPEAK TO HIM WHEN HE GETS OUT OF HIS CRAFT. IT'S BEST TO BE ON GOOD TERMS WITH A MEMBER OF THE IMPERIAL FAMILY.


JANNO RECOGNISED THE YOUNG SCIENTIST.
HELLO! ROBI, ISN'T IT? AS YOU SEE, MY LEG IS MENDED AND I'M BACK ON FLYING DUTY.
VERY GLAD TO SEE YOU RECOVERED, LORD JANNO. I'VE BROUGHT SOMETHING FOR YOU. SOMETHING YOU PROBABLY THOUGHT YOU'D LOST FOR EVER...

MY SIGNET RING!
YOU DROPPED IT THE DAY YOU VISITED THE LABORATORY, LORD JANNO. I FOUND IT WHEN I WAS SWEEPING UP THIS MORNING.

JANNO WAS PROFUSE IN HIS THANKS. HE WOULD HAVE BEEN SURPRISED TO HAVE SEEN WHAT ROBI HELD IN HIS HAND AS HE WALKED AWAY.
EVERYBODY'S HAPPY! THE STUCK-UP LORD JANNO HAS HIS RING BACK – AND I HAVE AN EXACT DUPLICATE OF IT!


THAT NIGHT, TRIGAN CITY SUFFERED THE FIRST OF MANY INEXPLICABLE THEFTS. ROBI'S HENCHMAN STOLE A COLLECTION OF GEMS FROM THE HOME OF A MILLIONAIRE.
CRY OUT – AND IT WILL BE THE LAST SOUND YOU EVER MAKE!
AAAAH! TAKE THE JEWELS! TAKE ANYTHING – BUT DON'T HURT ME!

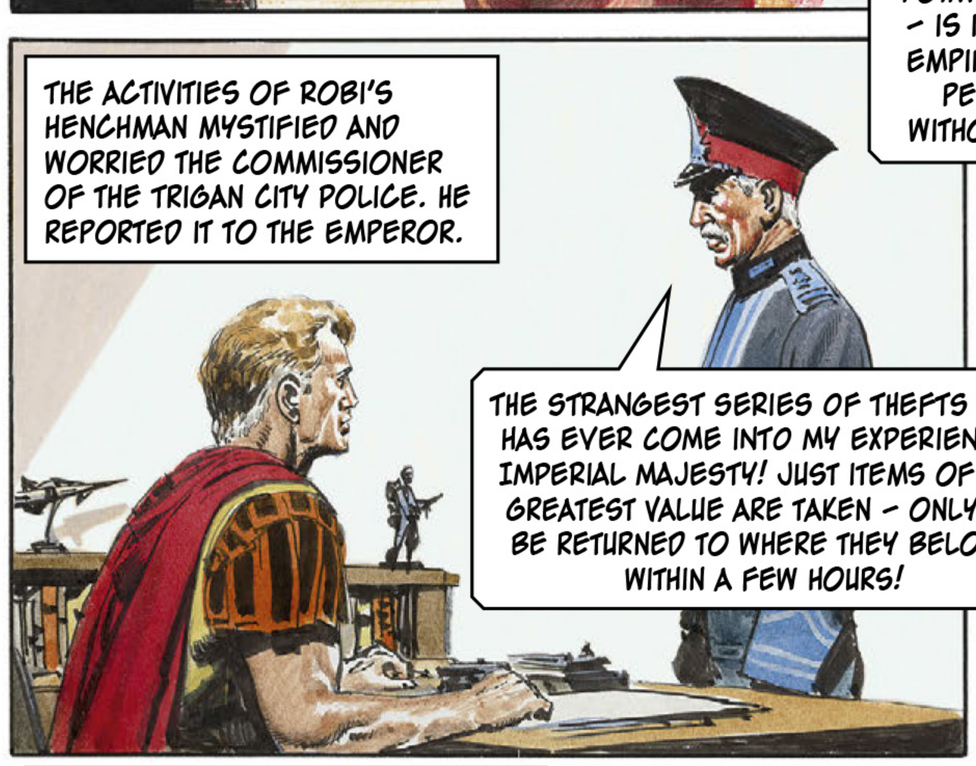
HE DELIVERED THEM TO THE DARKENED LABORATORY WHERE ROBI WAITED.
GOOD! NOW WAIT OUTSIDE TILL I CALL YOU. YOU HAVE ONE MORE TASK TO PERFORM BEFORE DAWN.

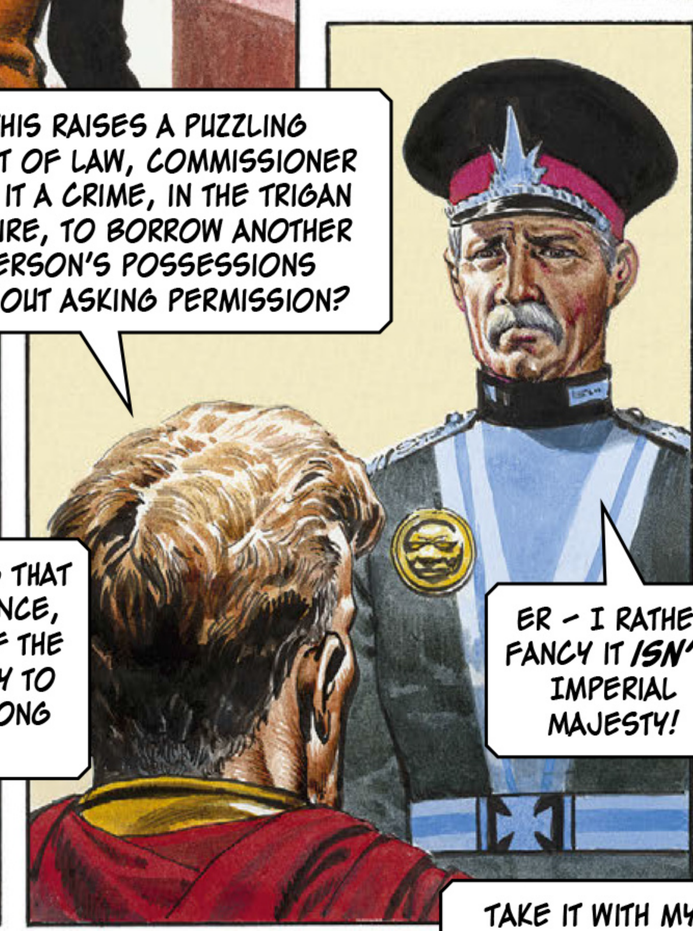
WITH THE AID OF THE STRANGE DEVICE HE HAD SECRETLY PERFECTED, THE RUTHLESS YOUNG SCIENTIST DUPLICATED THE PRICELESS GEMS!
HA! HA! – NOTHING CAN STOP ME NOW – NOTHING! BY THE END OF THE LUNAR YEAR, I SHALL BE ABLE TO BUY AND SELL THE TRIGAN EMPIRE!

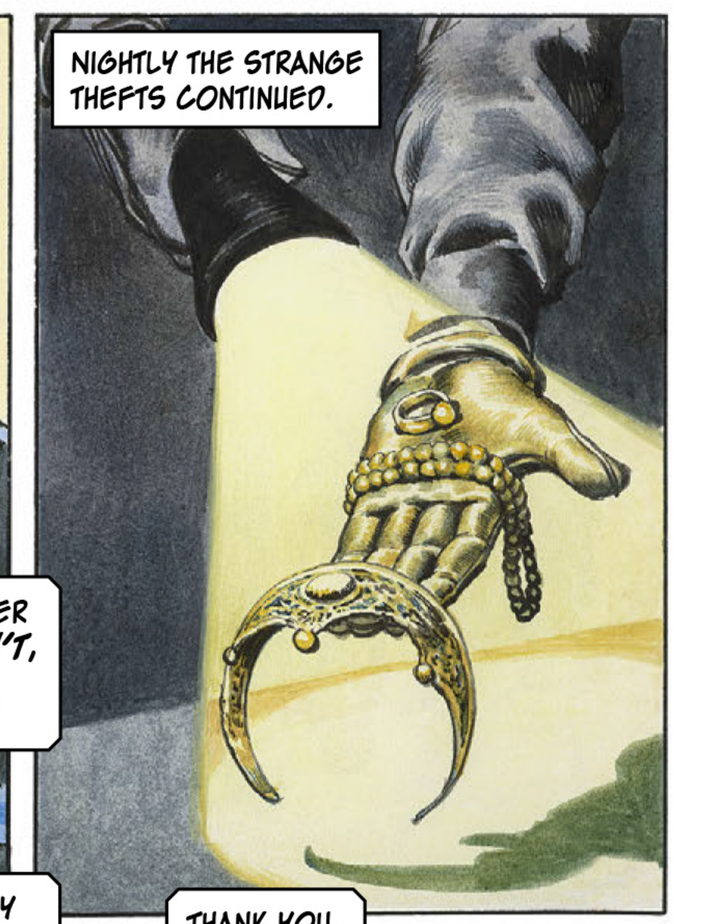
THERE WAS A SURPRISE IN STORE FOR HIS HENCHMAN, LATER.
YOU ASK ME TO RETURN THIS LOOT TO WHERE I STOLE IT FROM! – MASTER, HAVE YOU GONE MAD?
NO, MY FRIEND. I HAVE NOT GONE MAD. I HAVE SIMPLY DISCOVERED THE PERFECT CRIME!

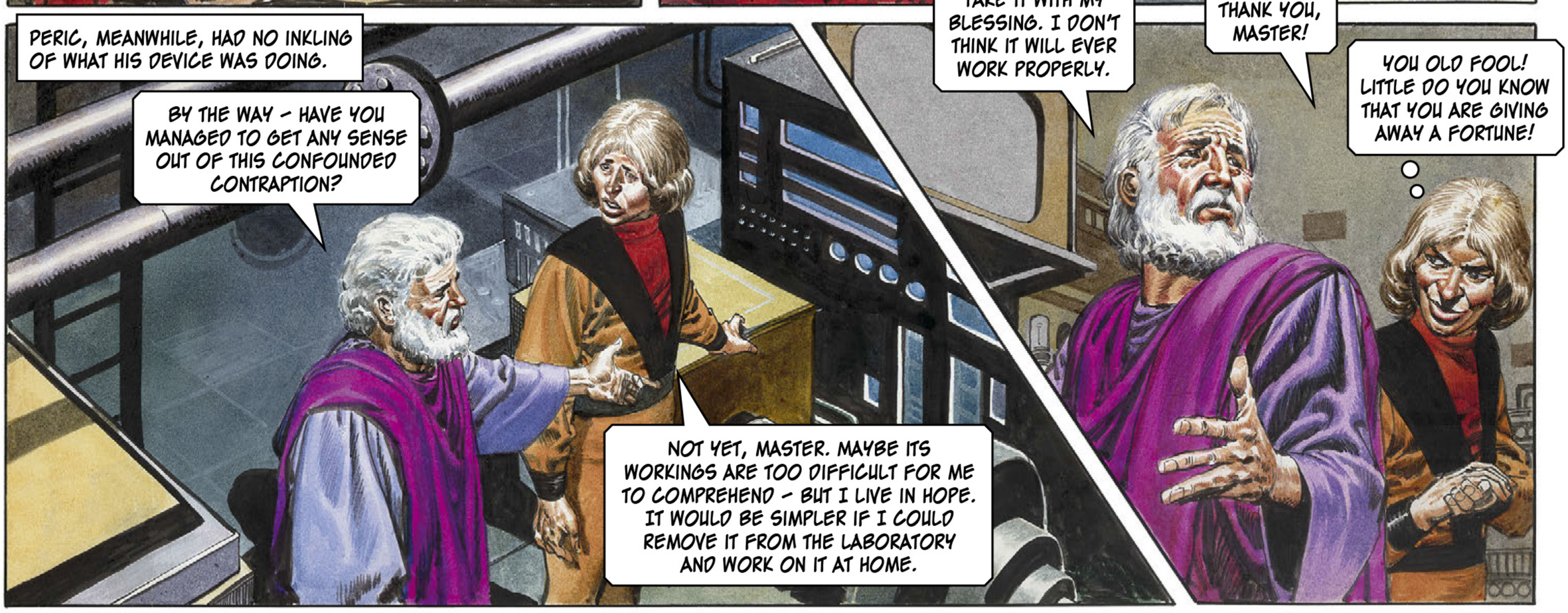
NIGHTLY AND IN GREAT SECRECY, ROBI MADE USE OF THE STRANGE DEVICE IN HIS MASTER'S LABORATORY.
NOTHING CAN STOP ME NOW – NOTHING!

THE DEVICE WAS CAPABLE OF DUPLICATING ANY PRECIOUS OBJECT PLACED WITHIN IT. HOWEVER, IT WOULD ONLY MAKE ONE COPY OF EACH OBJECT, AND THE DUPLICATES COULD NOT BE COPIED EITHER.
WHAT'S MORE, THE LAW CANNOT TOUCH ME – FOR I COMMIT NO CRIME!


THE ACTIVITIES OF ROBI'S HENCHMAN MYSTIFIED AND WORRIED THE COMMISSIONER OF THE TRIGAN CITY POLICE. HE REPORTED IT TO THE EMPEROR.
THE STRANGEST SERIES OF THEFTS THAT HAS EVER COME INTO MY EXPERIENCE, IMPERIAL MAJESTY! JUST ITEMS OF THE GREATEST VALUE ARE TAKEN – ONLY TO BE RETURNED TO WHERE THEY BELONG WITHIN A FEW HOURS!


THIS RAISES A PUZZLING POINT OF LAW, COMMISSIONER – IS IT A CRIME, IN THE TRIGAN EMPIRE, TO BORROW ANOTHER PERSON'S POSSESSIONS WITHOUT ASKING PERMISSION?
ER – I RATHER FANCY IT *ISN'T*, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!


NIGHTLY THE STRANGE THEFTS CONTINUED.


PERIC, MEANWHILE, HAD NO INKLING OF WHAT HIS DEVICE WAS DOING.
BY THE WAY – HAVE YOU MANAGED TO GET ANY SENSE OUT OF THIS CONFOUNDED CONTRAPTION?
NOT YET, MASTER. MAYBE ITS WORKINGS ARE TOO DIFFICULT FOR ME TO COMPREHEND – BUT I LIVE IN HOPE. IT WOULD BE SIMPLER IF I COULD REMOVE IT FROM THE LABORATORY AND WORK ON IT AT HOME.
TAKE IT WITH MY BLESSING. I DON'T THINK IT WILL EVER WORK PROPERLY.
THANK YOU, MASTER!
YOU OLD FOOL! LITTLE DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE GIVING AWAY A FORTUNE!

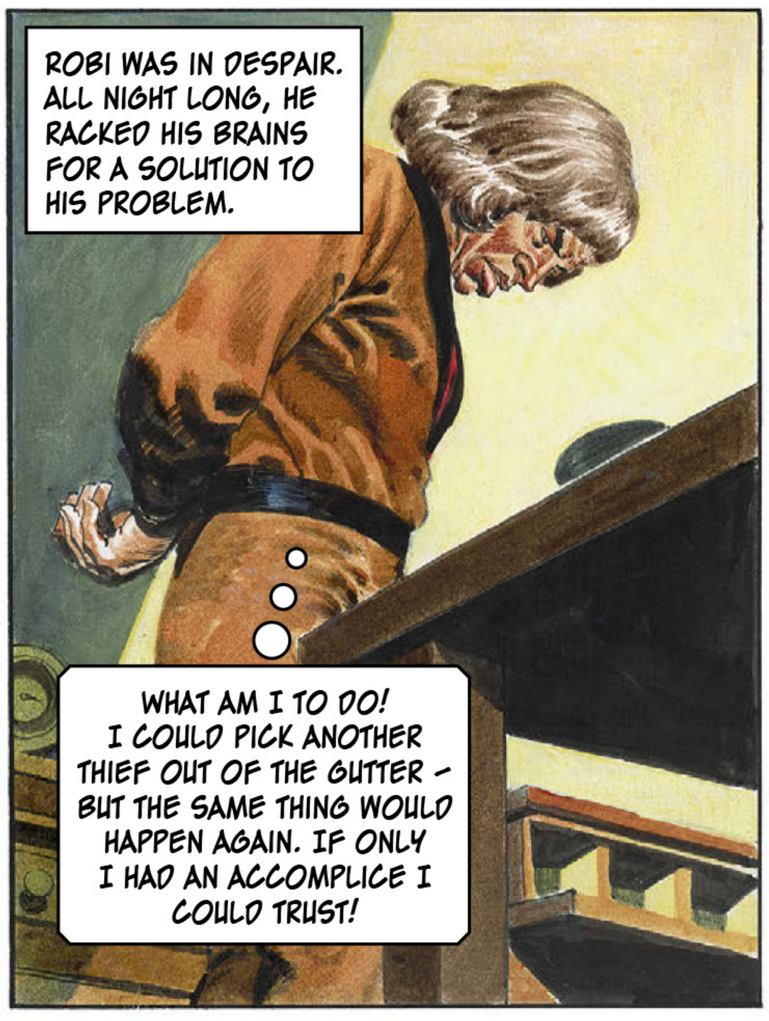
ONCE THE DEVICE WAS SET UP IN HIS OWN LODGINGS, ROBI WAS ABLE TO SPEND ALL HIS SPARE TIME IN ADDING TO HIS HOARD.
WHAT ABOUT THIS! I SNEAKED IT OUT OF THE STATE MUSEUM!
WONDERFUL! WONDERFUL!

BUT WHAT'S THIS? BY ALL THE STARS, THIS RING YOU'RE WEARING WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN RETURNED DAYS AGO! WHAT HAPPENED TO ITS COMPANION PIECES, YOU ROGUE?
I – I SOLD THEM! WELL, WHY NOT? I'M SICK OF TAKING STUFF AND THEN HAVING TO RETURN IT.

SOLD THEM? YOU BLUNDERING DOLT! DON'T YOU REALISE, THAT IF THE CITY POLICE TRACE THESE PIECES BACK TO YOU, WE COULD BOTH SPEND THE NEXT TEN LUNAR YEARS IN THE MINES?

GET OUT AND STAY OUT! I'VE FINISHED WITH YOU!
AAAAAAAAAAGH!

I'VE NOT FINISHED WITH YOU, MASTER!


ROBI WAS IN DESPAIR. ALL NIGHT LONG, HE RACKED HIS BRAINS FOR A SOLUTION TO HIS PROBLEM.
WHAT AM I TO DO! I COULD PICK ANOTHER THIEF OUT OF THE GUTTER – BUT THE SAME THING WOULD HAPPEN AGAIN. IF ONLY I HAD AN ACCOMPLICE I COULD TRUST!

AND THEN – HIS EYES FELL UPON THE STRANGE DEVICE. AND A WILD IDEA SPRANG INTO HIS MIND!
SUPPOSING I WERE TO MAKE A DUPLICATE OF MY OWN SELF! THERE IS ONLY ONE PERSON ON ELEKTON I CAN REALLY TRUST – MYSELF!

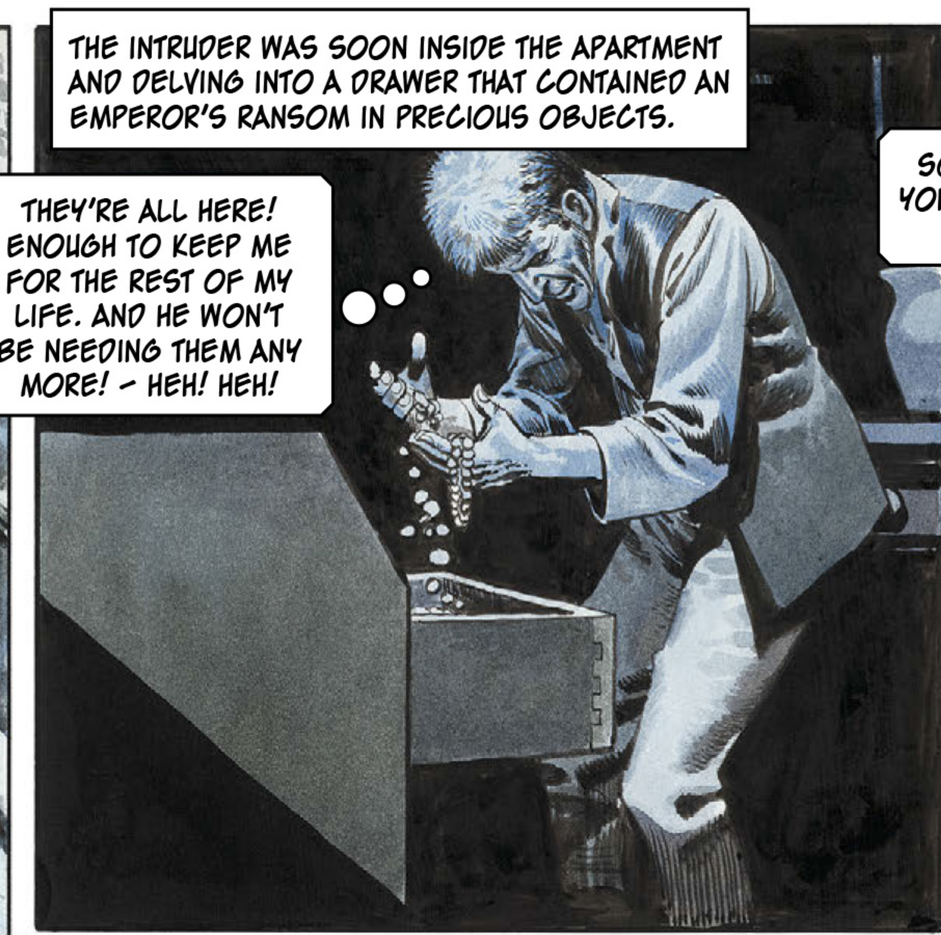
IT IS AT THIS POINT IN TIME THAT FATE INTRUDES UPON OUR STRANGE STORY. A TRIGAN WARSHIP, VOYAGING IN THICK FOG, COLLIDED WITH A PASSENGER LINER FROM CATO.
STOP ENGINES!
AAAH! THE ACCURSED TRIGAN IS GOING TO RAM US!
THE CATON VESSEL SANK WITH APPALLING CASUALTIES.
THE MISHAP WAS TWISTED TO THEIR OWN ADVANTAGE BY AN EXTREMIST PARTY IN THE CATON SENATE WHO WISHED TO CRUSH THE TRIGAN EMPIRE.
I SAY THAT IT WAS A DELIBERATE ATTACK UPON ONE OF OUR UNARMED PASSENGER LINERS. HOW MUCH LONGER IS CATO GOING TO SWALLOW THESE OUTRAGES?
ON THE DAY THAT CATO DECLARED WAR UPON THE TRIGAN EMPIRE, ROBI COMPLETED CERTAIN ADJUSTMENTS TO HIS STRANGE DEVICE.
AND NOW – TO SEE IF IT IS CAPABLE OF DUPLICATING ME!
KRAKKKKK-KKKK-KKKK! AS THE MACHINE BEGAN TO WORK...
AAAEEEEEAAAGH!
WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER, HE STEPPED OUT AND CAME FACE-TO-FACE WITH – HIMSELF!
BY THE STARS! IT HAS WORKED!

YOU ARE ME!
AND I AM YOU – WE ARE DUPLICATES!

MEANWHILE, IN A LOW TAVERN IN THE ROUGHEST PART OF TRIGAN CITY, THE SNEAK THIEF WHO HAD FORMERLY BEEN ROBI'S ACCOMPLICE WAS DOING BUSINESS WITH A PAIR OF CUT-THROATS.
BECAUSE YOU ARE A DUPLICATE OF MYSELF, I CAN TRUST YOU IMPLICITLY. TOGETHER, WE CAN BECOME THE RICHEST AND MOST POWERFUL INHABITANTS OF THIS PLANET. LISTEN, AND I WILL TELL YOU THE DETAILS OF MY PLAN...
ALL RIGHT! YOU WANT US TO GET RID OF THIS ROBI FELLOW – WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO PAY US?
HOW ABOUT THIS RING? – WORTH AN EMPEROR'S RANSOM!
DONE! ROBI IS AS GOOD AS DEAD.

LATER THAT DAY...
THERE HE IS – HE FITS THE DESCRIPTION OF ROBI!
RIGHT – LET'S GET HIM!
UUUUH...
THEY HURLED THE LIMP FORM OF THEIR VICTIM FROM THE HIGHEST CLIFFTOP NEAR TRIGAN CITY.
ONE... TWO...
THREE! AND AWAY HE GOES!

LATER THAT NIGHT, A DARK FIGURE CLIMBED THE FACE OF THE TENEMENT BUILDING THAT HOUSED ROBI'S APARTMENT.
THIS IS THE WINDOW...

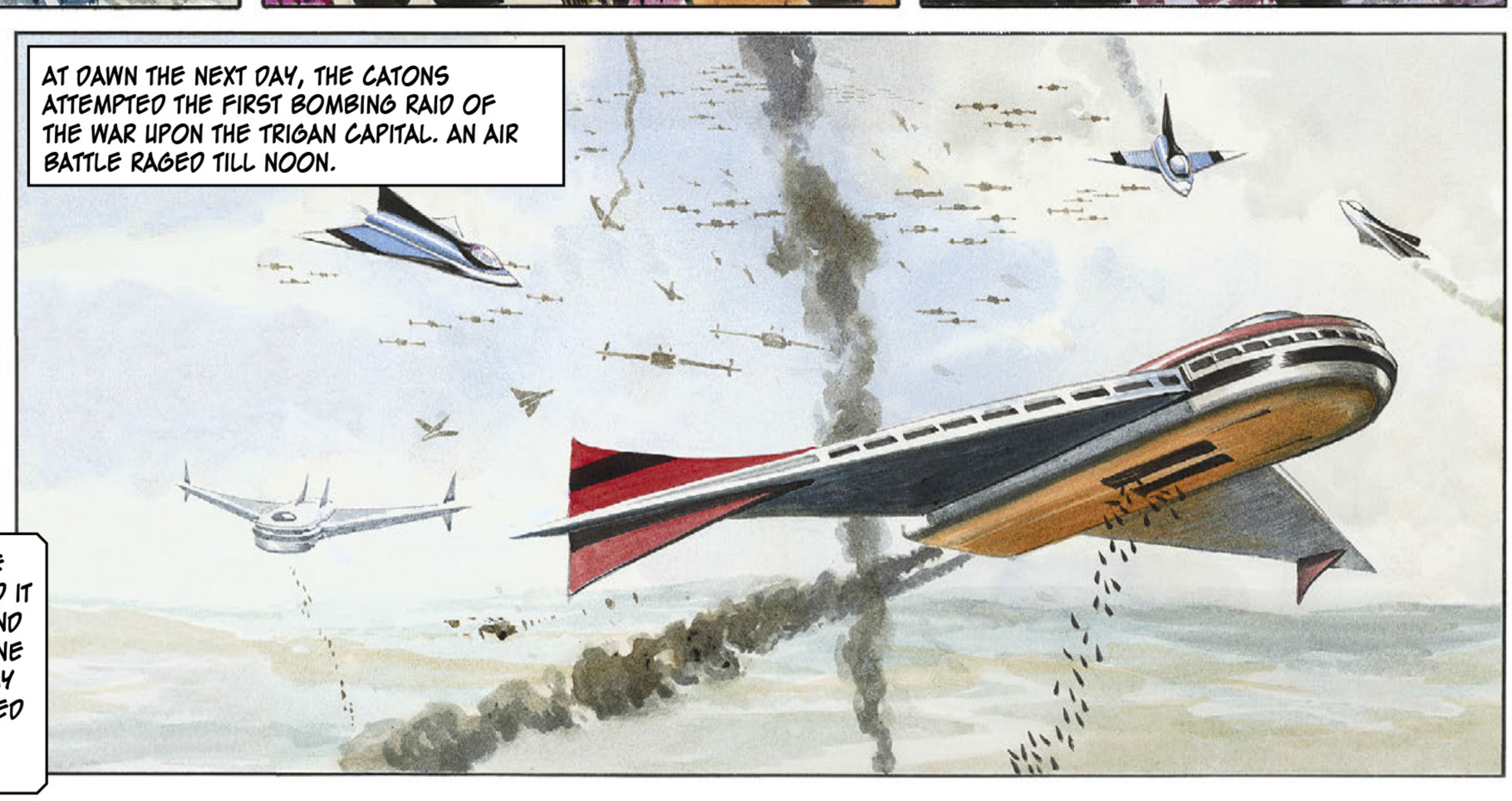

THE INTRUDER WAS SOON INSIDE THE APARTMENT AND DELVING INTO A DRAWER THAT CONTAINED AN EMPEROR'S RANSOM IN PRECIOUS OBJECTS.
THEY'RE ALL HERE! ENOUGH TO KEEP ME FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE. AND HE WON'T BE NEEDING THEM ANY MORE! – HEH! HEH!

AND THEN...
SO, YOU ANIMAL – YOU DARED TO COME BACK, EH?
AAAAAAAAAAH!

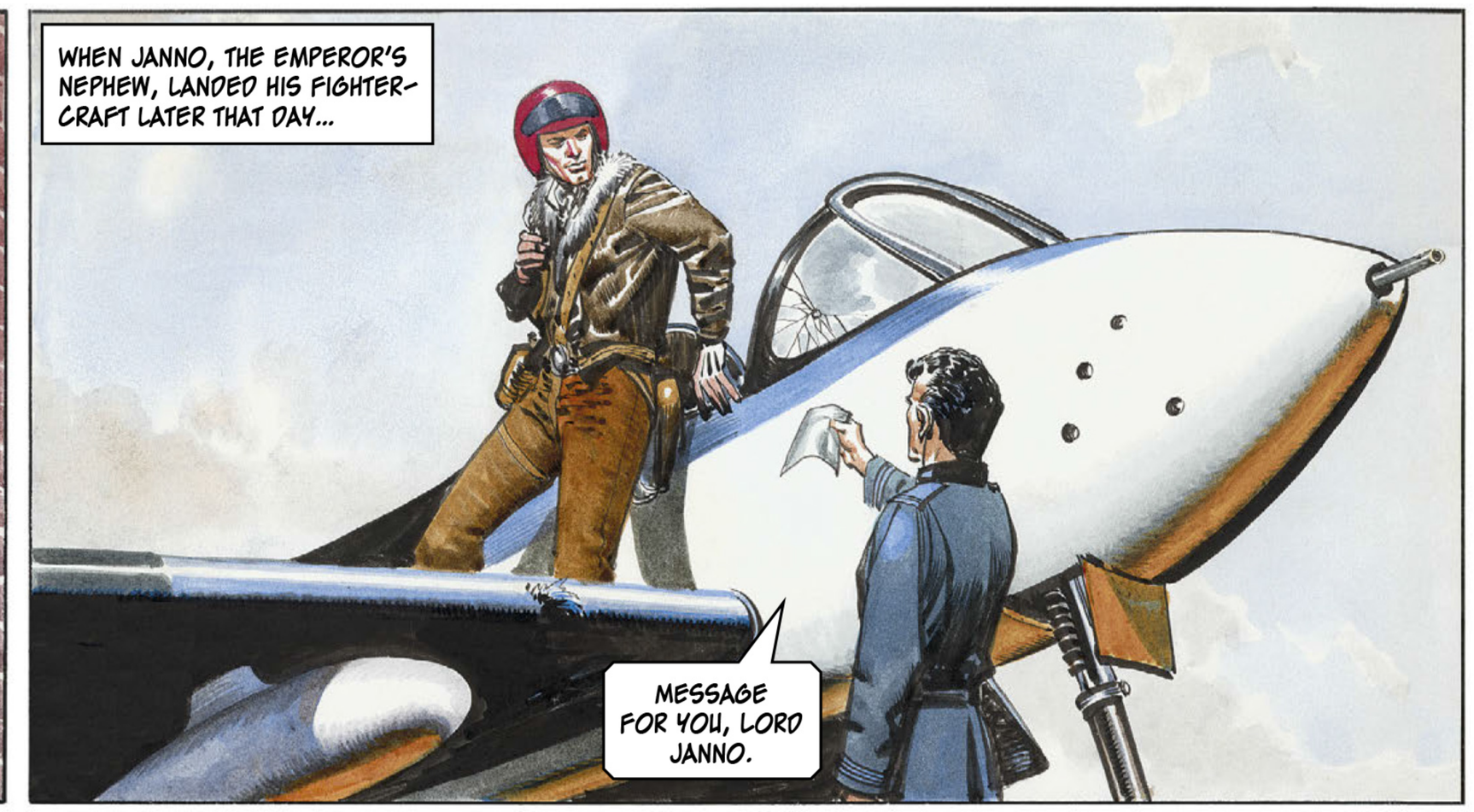
THE THIEF STARED AT ROBI IN ASTONISHMENT.
YOU'RE A GHOST! AN EVIL SPECTRE! WITH MY OWN EYES, I SAW YOU HURLED FROM THE CLIFF-TOP LAST EVENING! DON'T COME NEAR ME! YOU ARE EVIL – EVIL!

BLINDED BY PANIC, THE WRETCH FELL BACKWARDS TO HIS DOOM!
EEEEEEEAAAAAGH!

IN THE SILENCE THAT FOLLOWED, ROBI LOOKED DOWN.
SO THAT'S IT, EH? MY DUPLICATE WAS DESTROYED BY THAT CUR! AND IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO MAKE A SECOND COPY OF MYSELF! I AM ALL ALONE AGAIN – AND THE CHANCES OF MY GREAT DISCOVERY BEING DETECTED INCREASE WITH EVERY DAY THAT PASSES! WHAT SHALL I DO?


AT DAWN THE NEXT DAY, THE CATONS ATTEMPTED THE FIRST BOMBING RAID OF THE WAR UPON THE TRIGAN CAPITAL. AN AIR BATTLE RAGED TILL NOON.

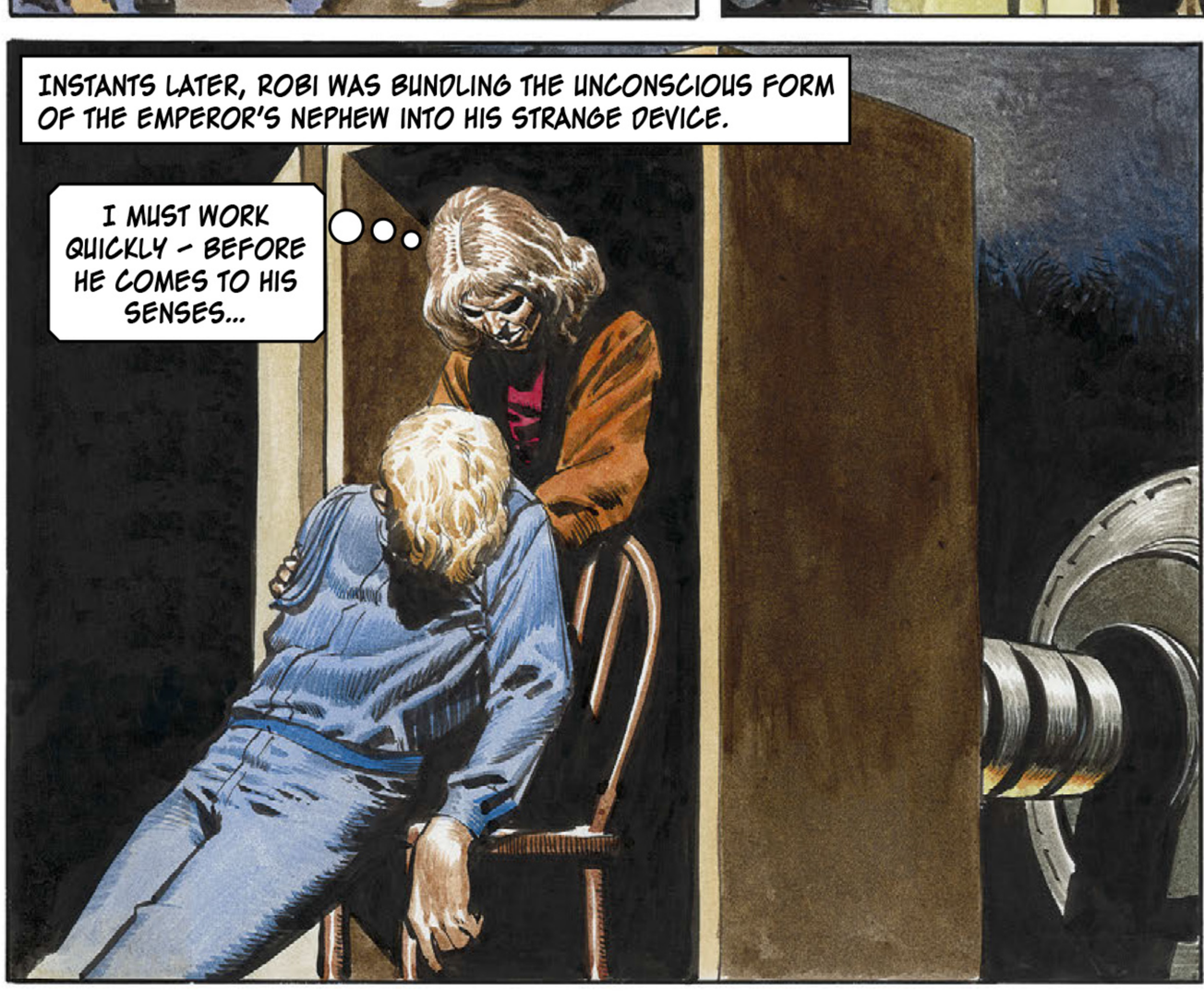
ROBI WITNESSED THE CONFLICT IN THE SKY – AND IT GAVE HIM FOOD FOR THOUGHT.
THAT'S IT! IT'S TO CATO I MUST LOOK TO COMPLETE MY FORTUNE! I WILL PROVIDE THEM WITH A RICH PRIZE, FOR WHICH THEY WILL PAY ME ANYTHING I DEMAND!

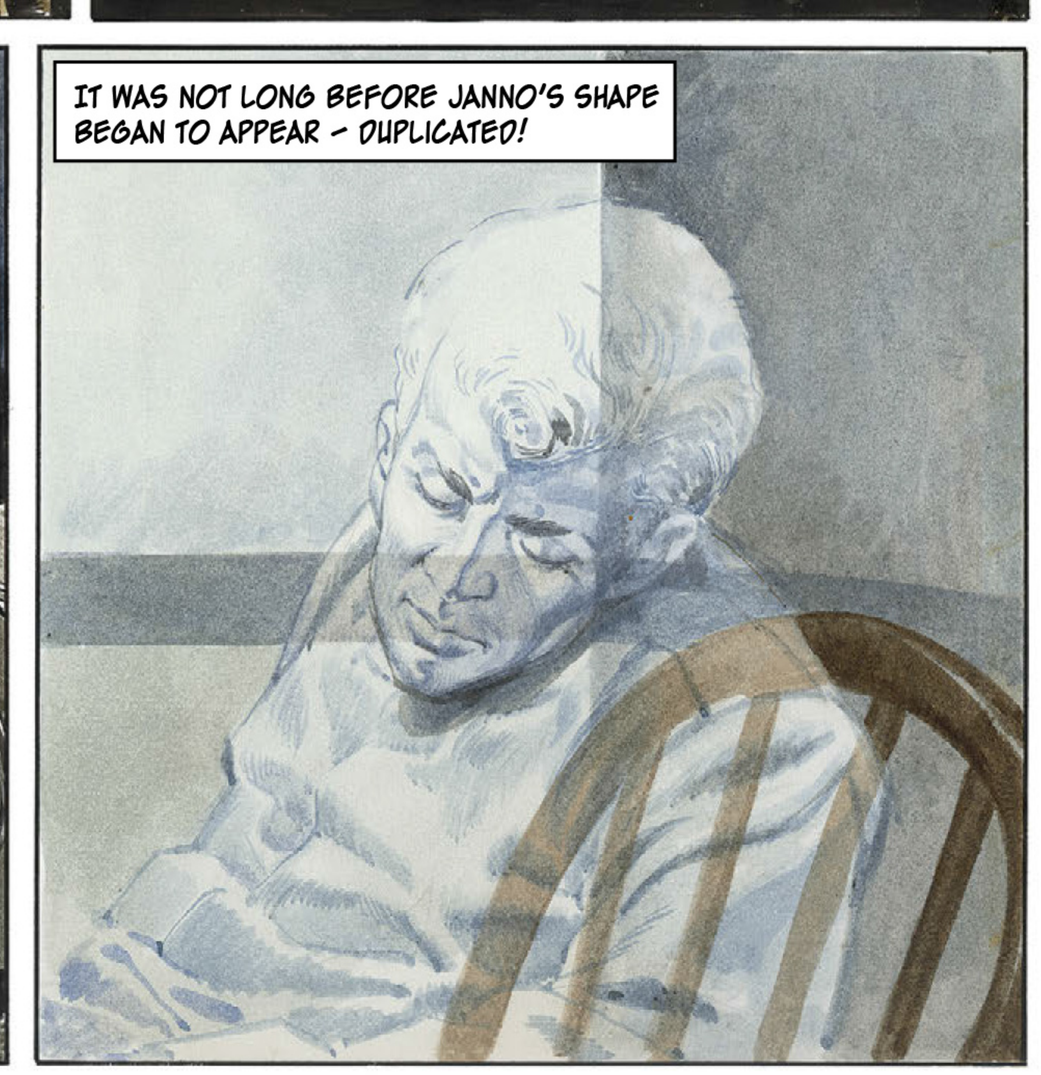

WHEN JANNO, THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW, LANDED HIS FIGHTER-CRAFT LATER THAT DAY...
MESSAGE FOR YOU, LORD JANNO.

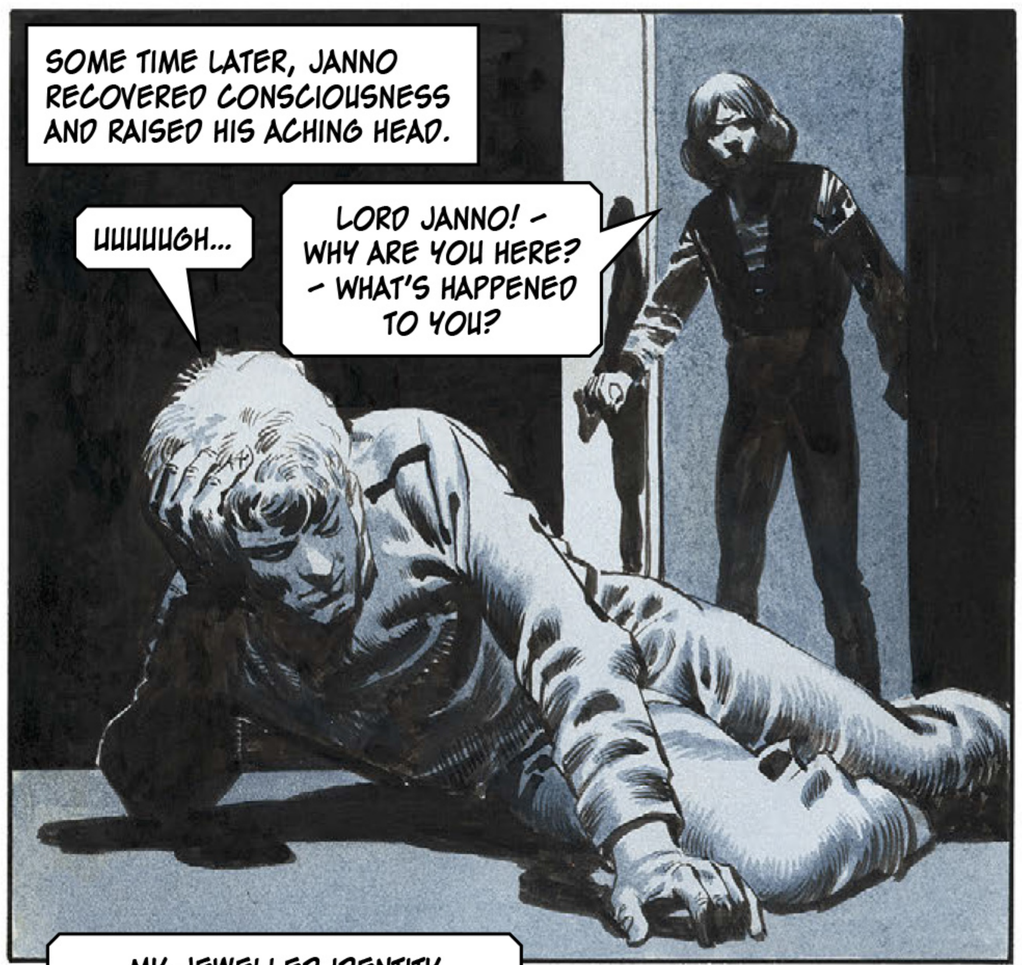
WHAT'S THIS? "YOU WILL REMEMBER ME, LORD JANNO. I AM PERIC'S ASSISTANT ROBI. I HAVE SOMETHING OF GREAT INTEREST TO SHOW YOU, IF YOU WILL COME TO MY APARTMENT..."

INTRIGUED AND MYSTIFIED BY THE STRANGE INVITATION, JANNO WENT TO ROBI'S APARTMENT THAT EVENING. HE FOUND THE DOOR AJAR.
ROBI! – ARE YOU IN THERE?

SUDDEN OBLIVION DESCENDED UPON JANNO!
UUUUUH...


INSTANTS LATER, ROBI WAS BUNDLING THE UNCONSCIOUS FORM OF THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW INTO HIS STRANGE DEVICE.
I MUST WORK QUICKLY – BEFORE HE COMES TO HIS SENSES...


IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE JANNO'S SHAPE BEGAN TO APPEAR – DUPLICATED!

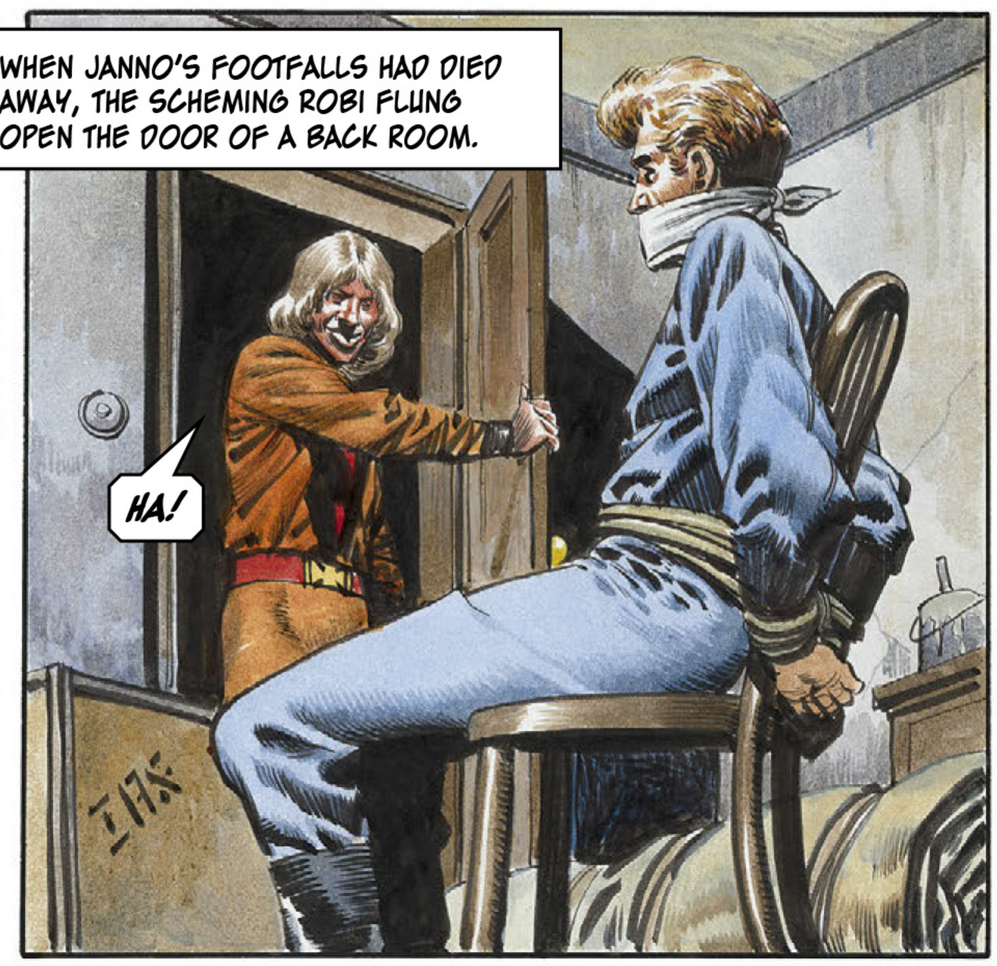

SOME TIME LATER, JANNO RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS AND RAISED HIS ACHING HEAD.
UUUUUGH...
LORD JANNO! – WHY ARE YOU HERE? – WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU?

CONFOUND IT, MAN, YOU KNOW VERY WELL WHAT I'M DOING HERE! I CAME IN ANSWER TO YOUR MESSAGE, AND NO SOONER DID I SET FOOT INSIDE THE DOOR THAN I WAS STRUCK DOWN FROM BEHIND!
MESSAGE, LORD JANNO? – WHAT MESSAGE?

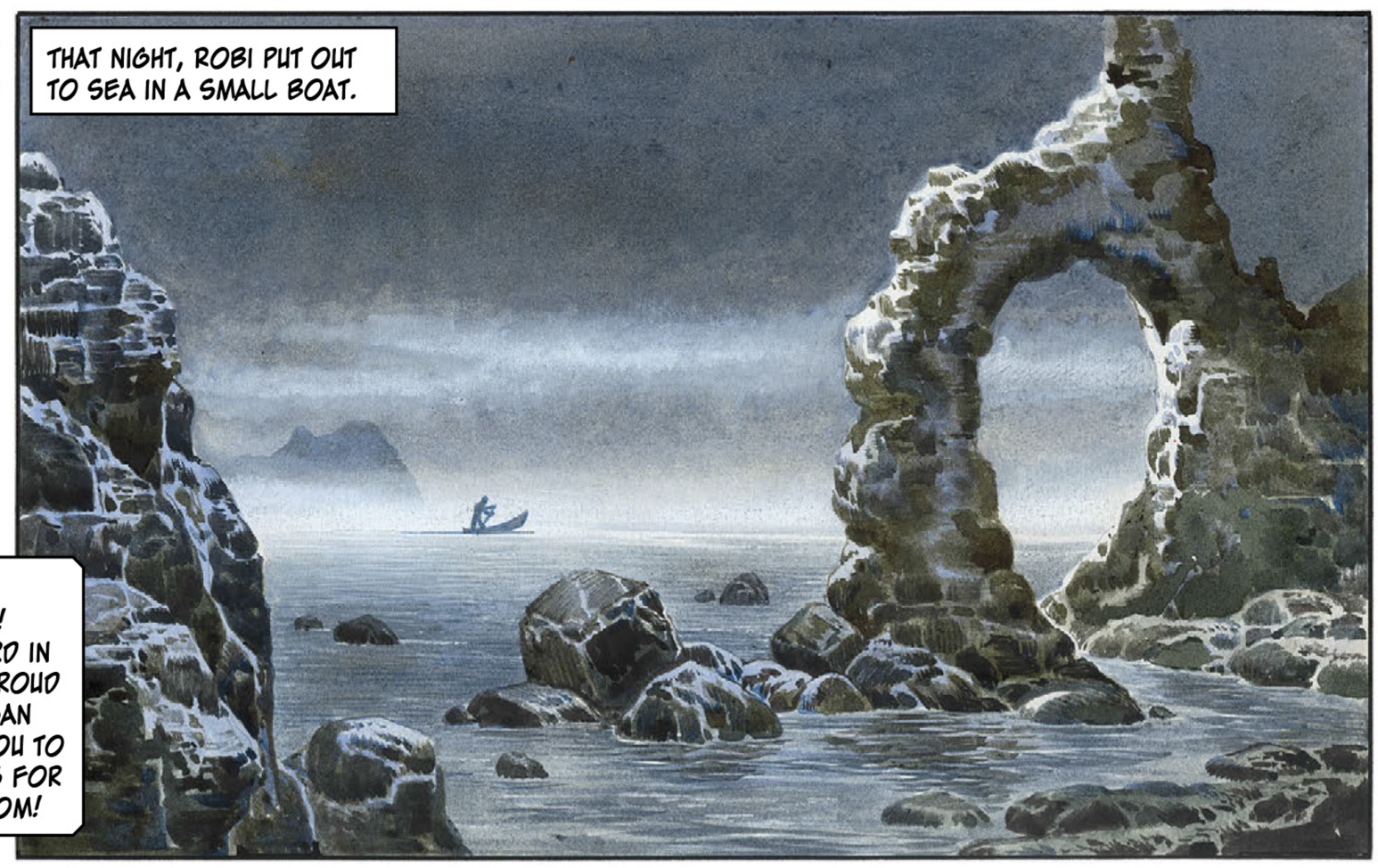
JANNO HANDED THE YOUNG SCIENTIST THE NOTE THAT HAD BEEN DELIVERED TO THE AIR FLEET BASE.
BUT, MY LORD, THIS IS NOT FROM ME – IT IS NOT EVEN MY HANDWRITING! SOMEONE MUST HAVE LURED YOU HERE TO ROB YOU!
BY ALL THE STARS!

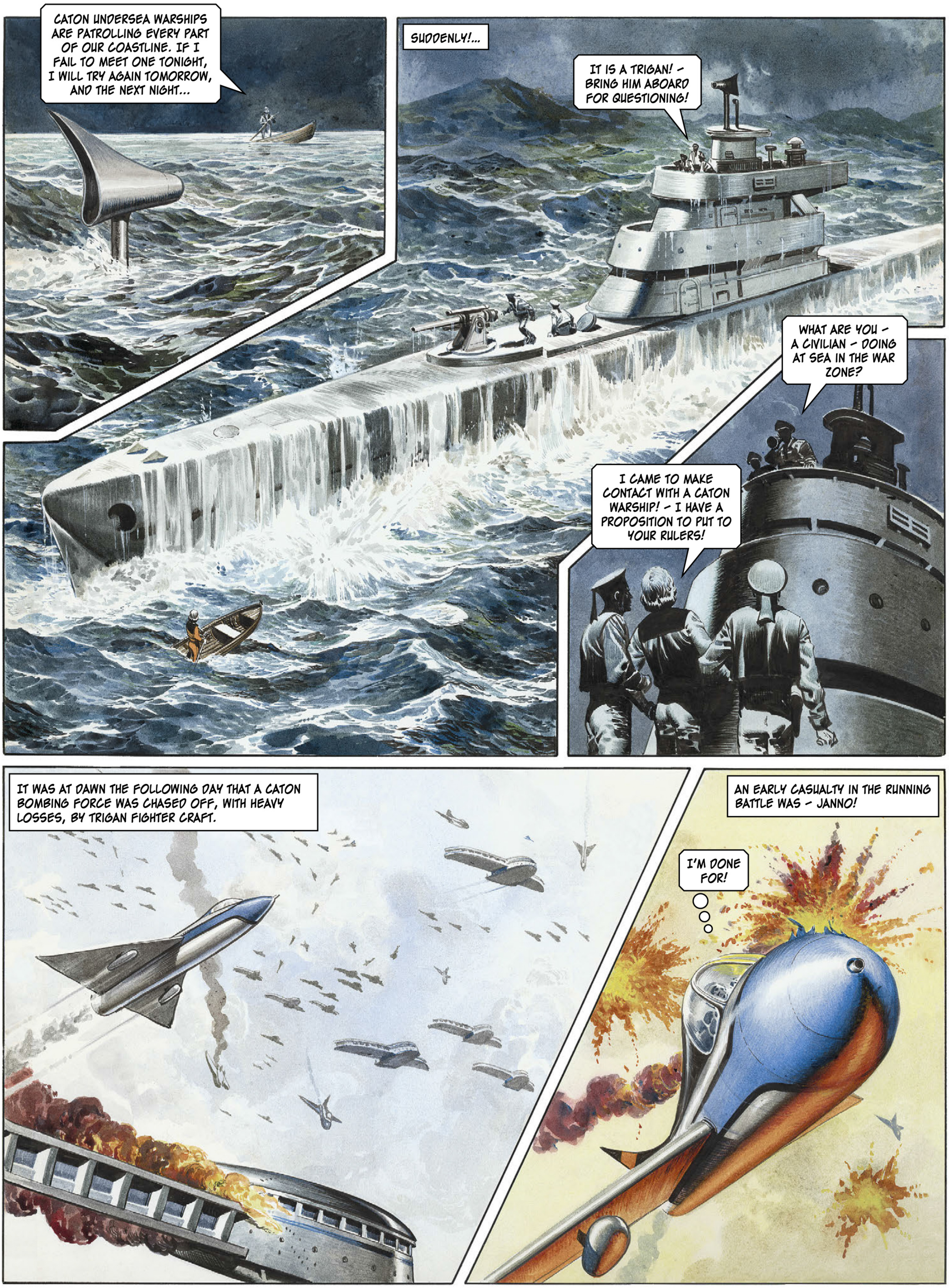
MY JEWELLED IDENTITY MEDALLION – GONE! AND MY RING! AND A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF MONEY TOO! CURSE THE THIEF, WHOEVER HE IS!
AND THAT THE THIEF SHOULD HAVE USED MY NAME AND MY HOME – THIS PUTS ME IN A TERRIBLY EMBARRASSING POSITION!

FORGET IT, ROBI – YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME! FAREWELL.
FAREWELL, MY LORD – YOU ARE VERY KIND.

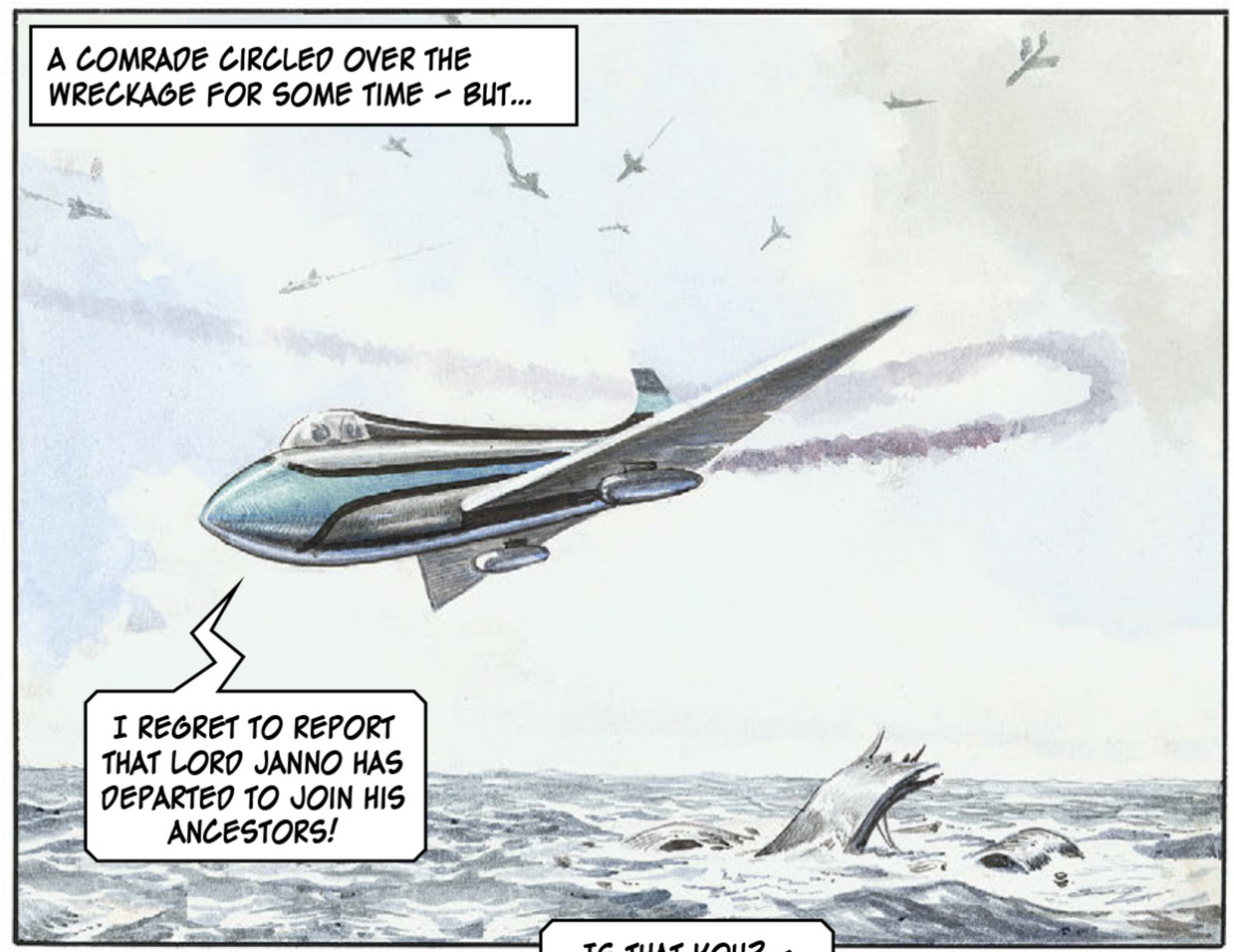

WHEN JANNO'S FOOTFALLS HAD DIED AWAY, THE SCHEMING ROBI FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR OF A BACK ROOM.
HA!

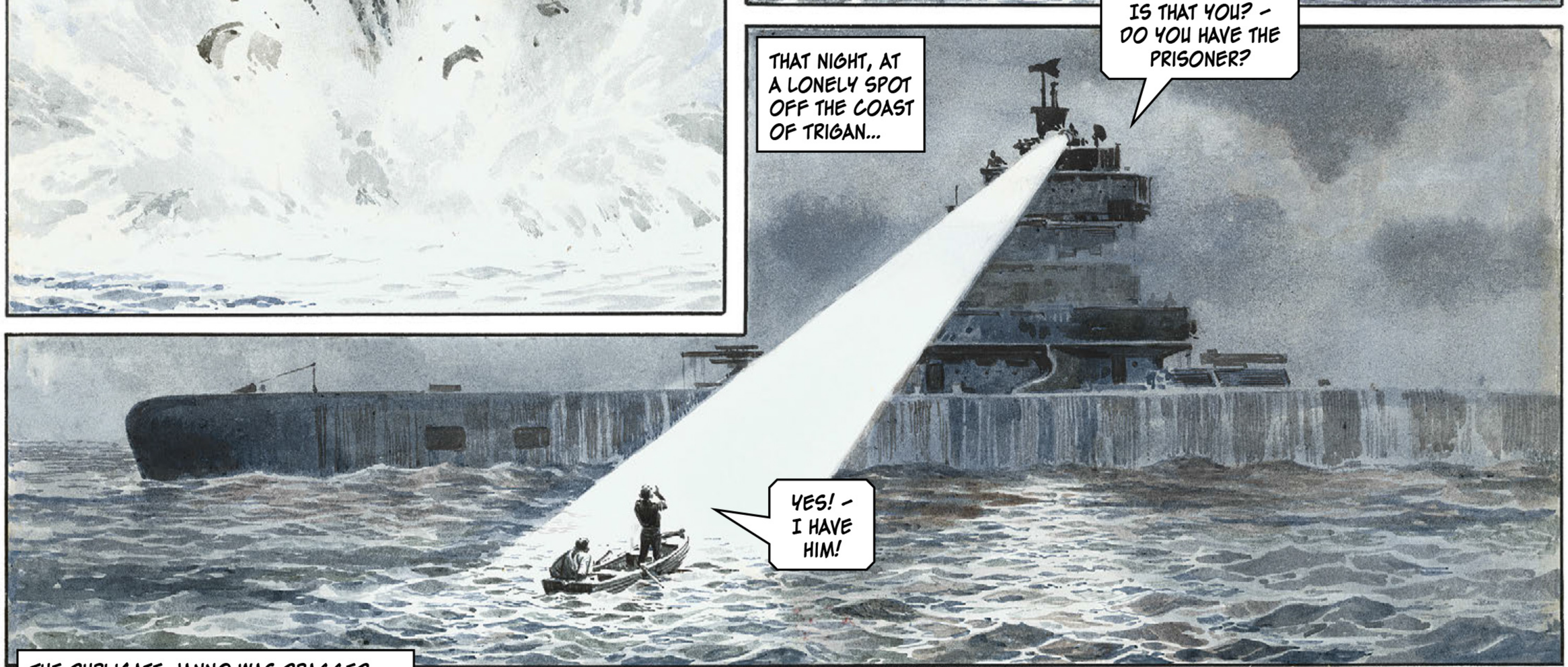
THERE, BOUND AND GAGGED, SAT JANNO'S EXACT DUPLICATE!
YOU ARE WORTH A FORTUNE TO ME! TRIGO'S NEPHEW! THIRD IN SUCCESSION TO THE PROUD THRONE OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE! I CAN SELL YOU TO THE EMPIRE'S ENEMIES FOR AN EMPEROR'S RANSOM!

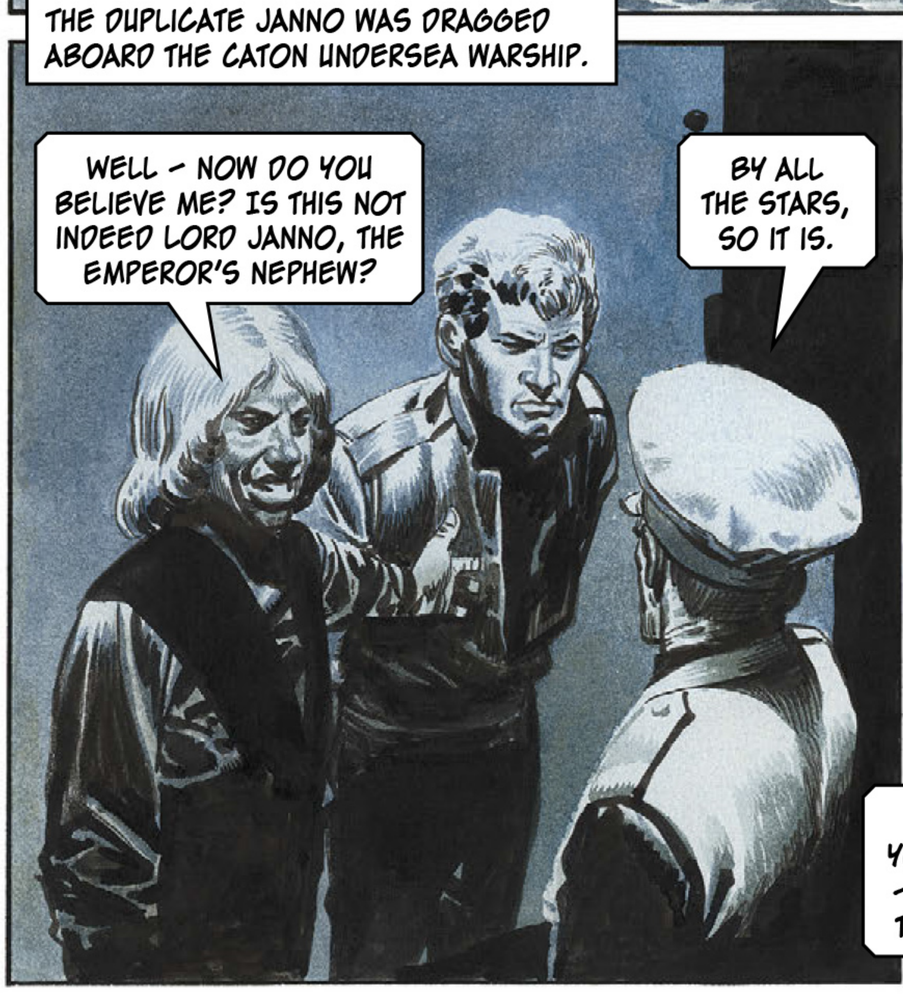

THAT NIGHT, ROBI PUT OUT TO SEA IN A SMALL BOAT.


CATON UNDERSEA WARSHIPS ARE PATROLLING EVERY PART OF OUR COASTLINE. IF I FAIL TO MEET ONE TONIGHT, I WILL TRY AGAIN TOMORROW, AND THE NEXT NIGHT...
SUDDENLY!...
IT IS A TRIGAN! – BRING HIM ABOARD FOR QUESTIONING!
WHAT ARE YOU – A CIVILIAN – DOING AT SEA IN THE WAR ZONE?
I CAME TO MAKE CONTACT WITH A CATON WARSHIP! – I HAVE A PROPOSITION TO PUT TO YOUR RULERS!
IT WAS AT DAWN THE FOLLOWING DAY THAT A CATON BOMBING FORCE WAS CHASED OFF, WITH HEAVY LOSSES, BY TRIGAN FIGHTER CRAFT.
AN EARLY CASUALTY IN THE RUNNING BATTLE WAS – JANNO!
I'M DONE FOR!

JANNO'S CRAFT PLUMMETED INTO THE SEA.


A COMRADE CIRCLED OVER THE WRECKAGE FOR SOME TIME – BUT...
I REGRET TO REPORT THAT LORD JANNO HAS DEPARTED TO JOIN HIS ANCESTORS!


THAT NIGHT, AT A LONELY SPOT OFF THE COAST OF TRIGAN...
IS THAT YOU? – DO YOU HAVE THE PRISONER?
YES! – I HAVE HIM!


THE DUPLICATE JANNO WAS DRAGGED ABOARD THE CATON UNDERSEA WARSHIP.
WELL – NOW DO YOU BELIEVE ME? IS THIS NOT INDEED LORD JANNO, THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW?
BY ALL THE STARS, SO IT IS.

THEN GIVE ME MY MONEY AND LET ME DEPART, ADMIRAL! TEN THOUSAND TRIGAN PIECES, AS AGREED!
YOU WILL BE PAID FOR YOUR TREACHERY, FELLOW – BUT MY ORDERS ARE TO TAKE YOU BACK TO CATO!

A COLD FINGER OF TERROR TRACED ITS COURSE DOWN ROBI'S SPINE.
I'M DONE FOR! AS SOON AS THE CATONS ANNOUNCE THAT THEY HAVE JANNO, THE TRIGANS WILL ISSUE A STATEMENT THAT IT IS A LIE! AAAAAH! THEN THE CATONS WILL TORTURE THE TRUTH OUT OF ME!

BUT FATE WAS ON ROBI'S SIDE. SOME TIME LATER, JANNO'S FATHER, BRAG, BROUGHT THE NEWS TO HIS BROTHER, THE EMPEROR TRIGO.

TRIGO! HE'S ALL RIGHT! JANNO'S ALL RIGHT! HE SURVIVED THE CRASH AFTER ALL, AND HE'S A PRISONER-OF-WAR!

THANK THE STARS! – WHAT ELSE DO THE CATONS SAY?

AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, THEY'RE USING JANNO TO EXERT PRESSURE ON US. THEY DEMAND AN INSTANT CEASE-FIRE, PENDING A CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS PEACE TERMS.

THEN WE WILL AGREE! AND I WILL BE WILLING TO AGREE TO ANY REASONABLE PEACE TERMS TO SAVE JANNO'S LIFE!

ROBI WAS IN CATON CITY WHEN HE HEARD OF THE EMPEROR'S REPLY TO THE ENEMY DEMANDS. AND HE THANKED HIS STARS.

FATE SMILES UPON THE CLEVER! THE TRIGANS ACCEPT THE DUPLICATE JANNO, WHICH CAN ONLY MEAN THE ORIGINAL JANNO IS MISSING IN BATTLE. ROBI, MY FINE FELLOW, YOU ARE MADE FOR LIFE!

THE DUPLICATE JANNO WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE RULERS OF CATO – A TRIUMVIRATE OF WARMONGERS BENT ON THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE.

GREETINGS, MY LORD! YOU WILL BE UNHAPPY TO HEAR THAT YOUR PRESENCE HERE IS SHORTLY GOING TO LEAD TO THE UTTER ANNIHILATION OF ALL YOU HOLD DEAR. I WILL EXPLAIN...

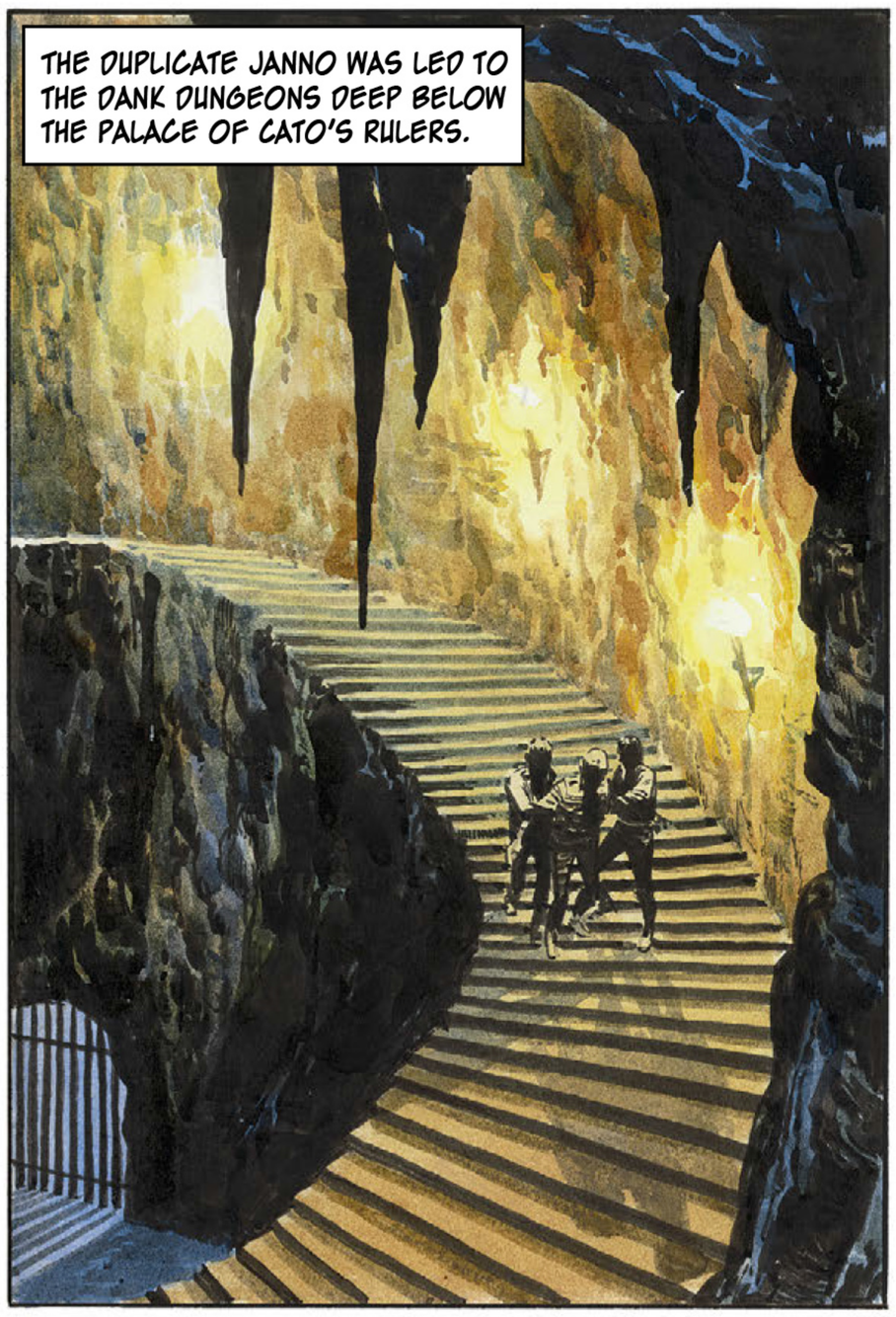
IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR DEMANDS, A CEASE-FIRE IS IN PROGRESS THROUGHOUT THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. YOUR AIR FLEET IS GROUNDED AND ALL DEFENCE SYSTEMS ARE RELAXED. LIKE A SLEEPING GIANT, TRIGAN'S POWERFUL FORCES LIE HELPLESS...

HE POINTED FROM THE BALCONY.

NOT SO IN CATO! AT DAWN TOMORROW, OUR AIR FLEET – WHICH YOU SEE THERE BEING PREPARED – WILL TAKE OFF TO BLAST TRIGAN CITY FROM THE FACE OF ELEKTON! AND THERE WILL BE NOTHING TO OPPOSE IT!

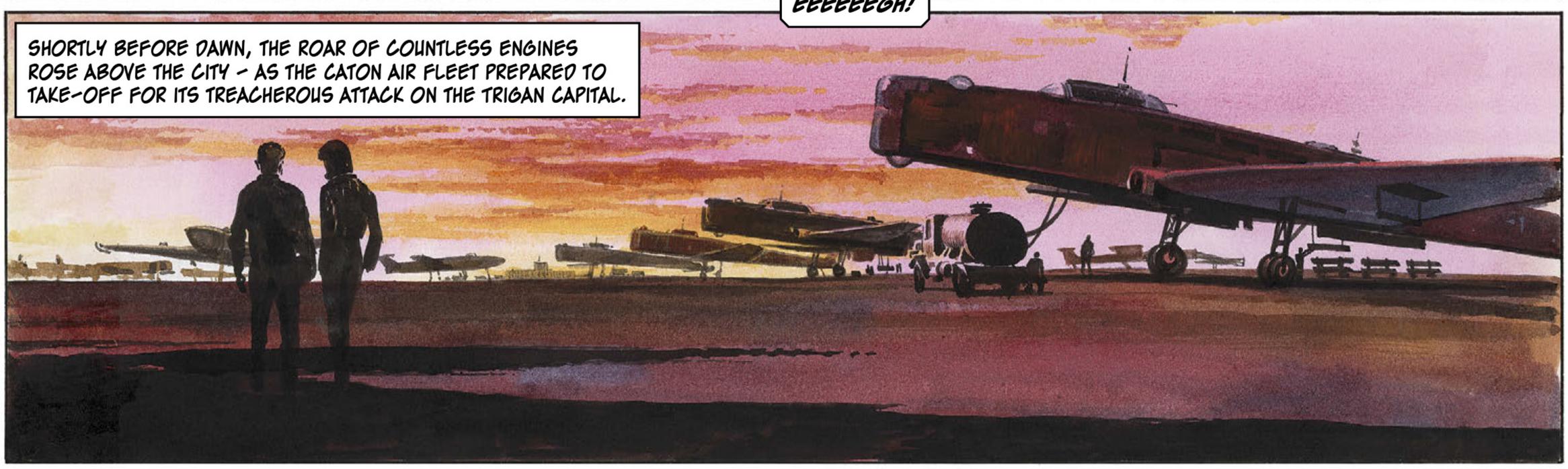
CONVEY LORD JANNO TO A DUNGEON – AND SEE THAT IT IS BOTH DARK AND DAMP.

TREACHEROUS ANIMAL! – *UUUUGH!*

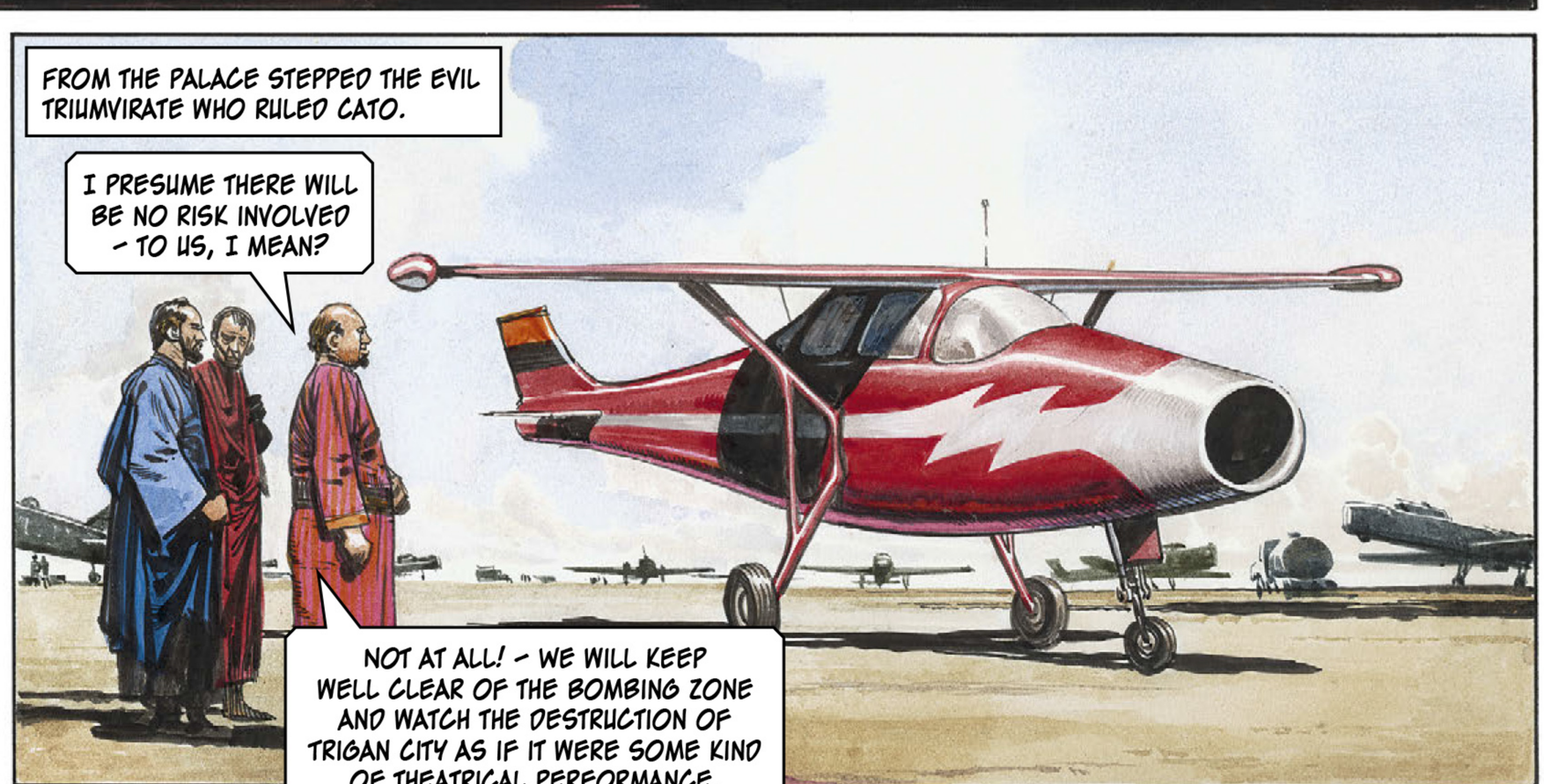

THE DUPLICATE JANNO WAS LED TO THE DANK DUNGEONS DEEP BELOW THE PALACE OF CATO'S RULERS.

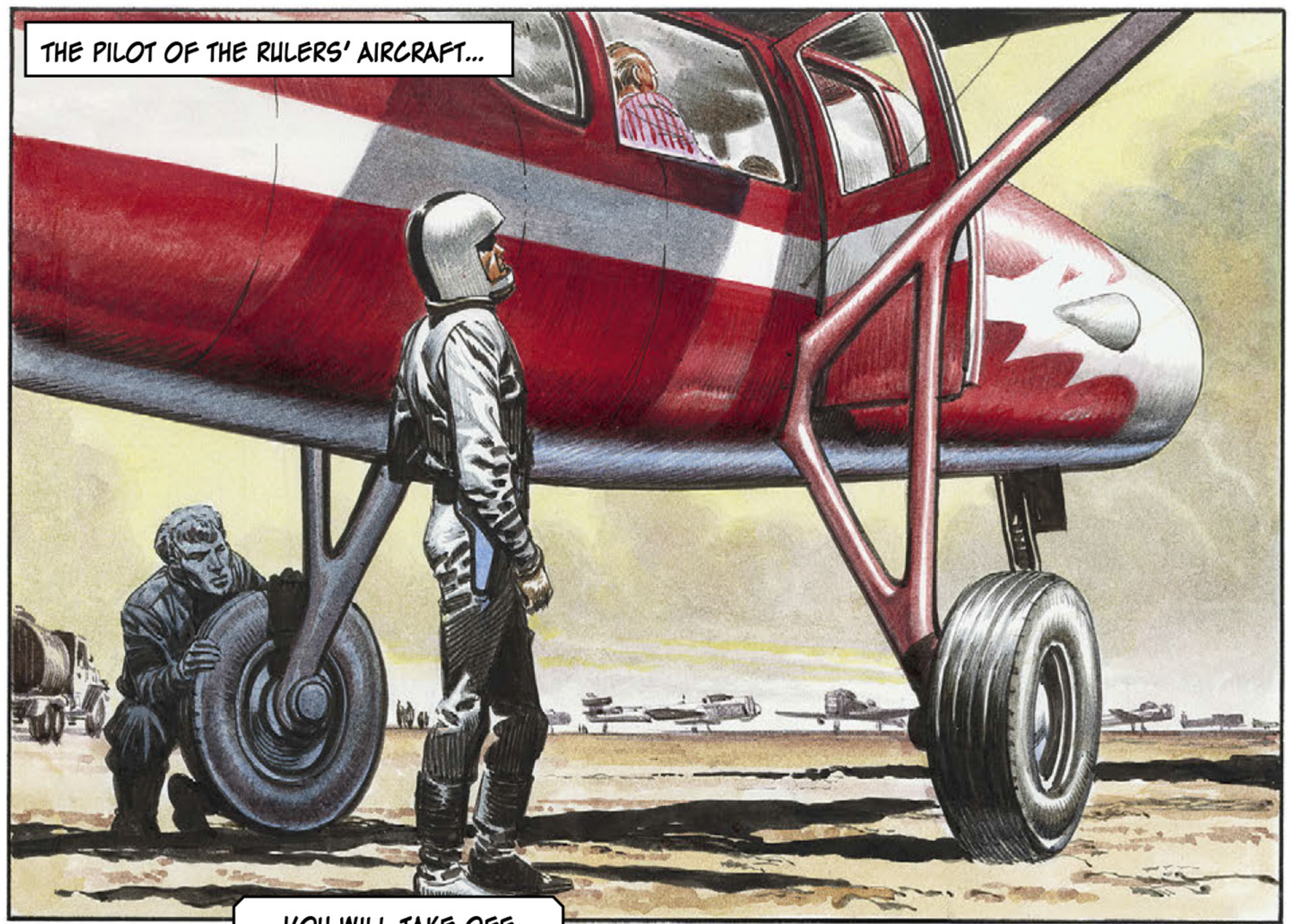
THEN – HE ACTED!
HA!
AAAAAGH!
EEEEEEGH!

THE BRUTISH JAILORS CRASHED TO THE BOTTOM OF THE STEEP STEPS AND LAY STILL. IT WAS THE WORK OF INSTANTS TO OPEN A DUNGEON DOOR AND BUNDLE THEM INSIDE...

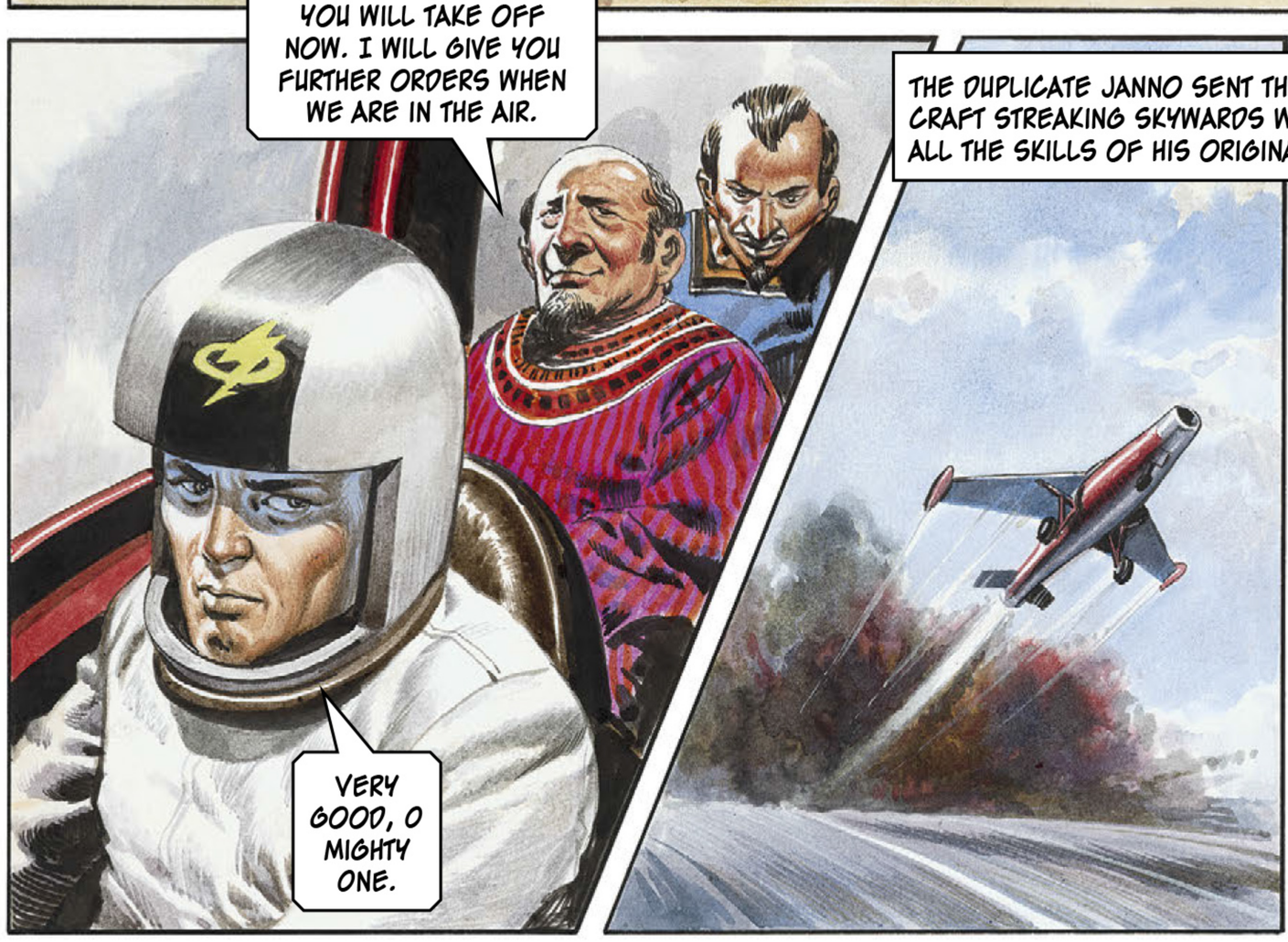

SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN, THE ROAR OF COUNTLESS ENGINES ROSE ABOVE THE CITY – AS THE CATON AIR FLEET PREPARED TO TAKE-OFF FOR ITS TREACHEROUS ATTACK ON THE TRIGAN CAPITAL.

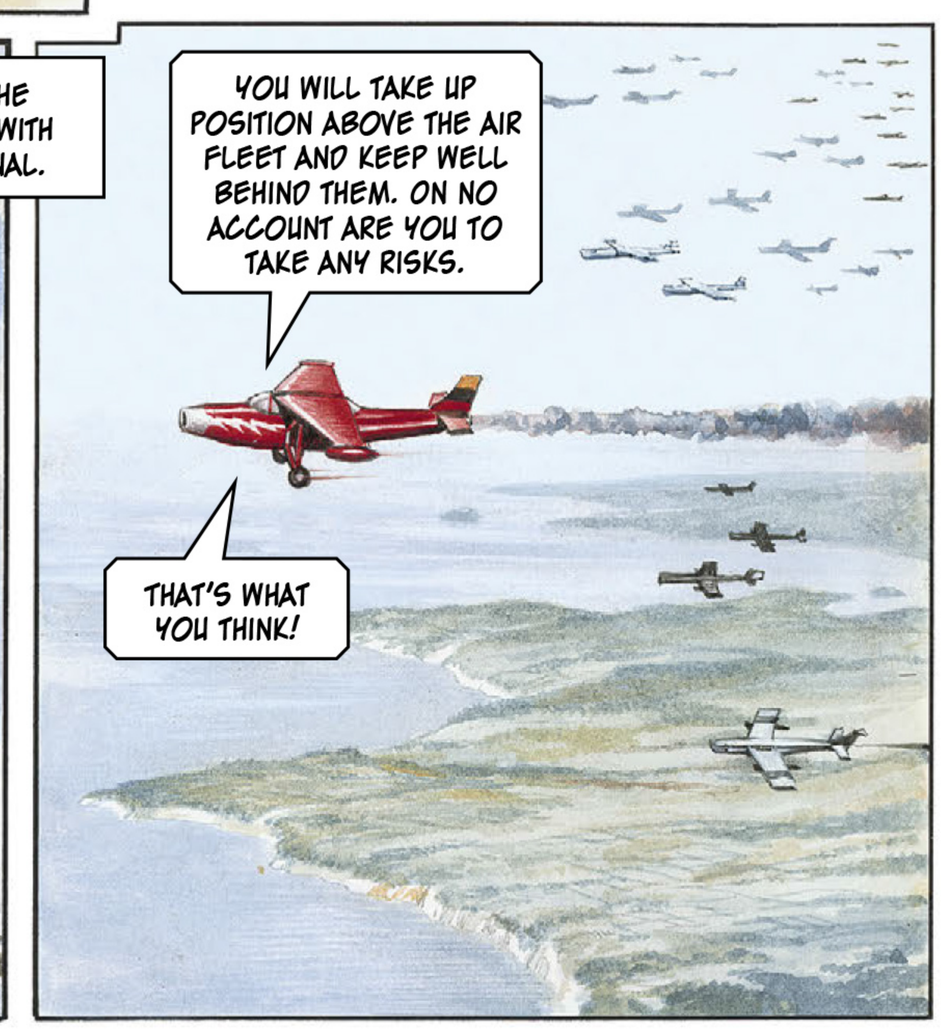
THE DUPLICATE JANNO WAS THERE!
ONLY ONE PERSON CAN SAVE TRIGAN CITY FROM TOTAL ANNIHILATION AND THAT PERSON IS ME!

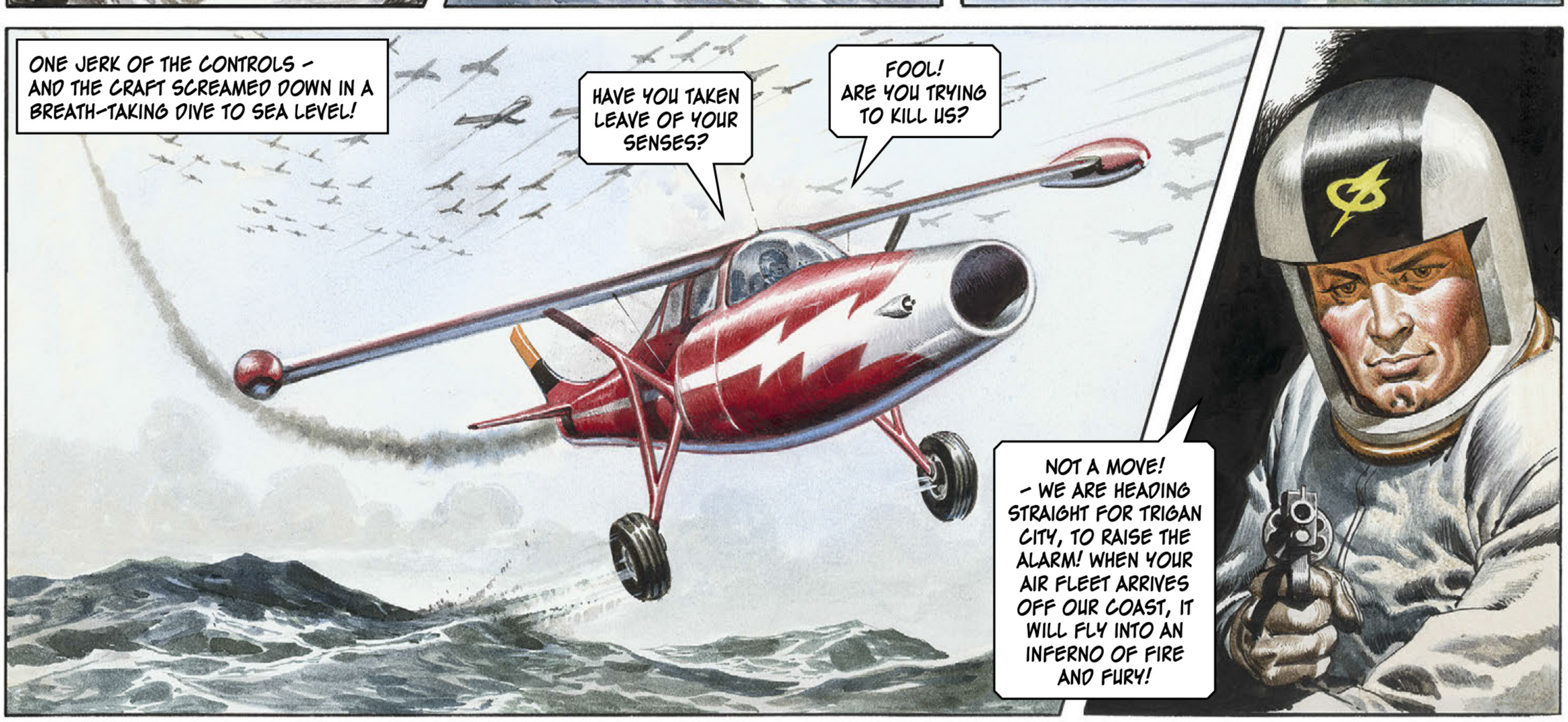

FROM THE PALACE STEPPED THE EVIL TRIUMVIRATE WHO RULED CATO.
I PRESUME THERE WILL BE NO RISK INVOLVED – TO US, I MEAN?
NOT AT ALL! – WE WILL KEEP WELL CLEAR OF THE BOMBING ZONE AND WATCH THE DESTRUCTION OF TRIGAN CITY AS IF IT WERE SOME KIND OF THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE.

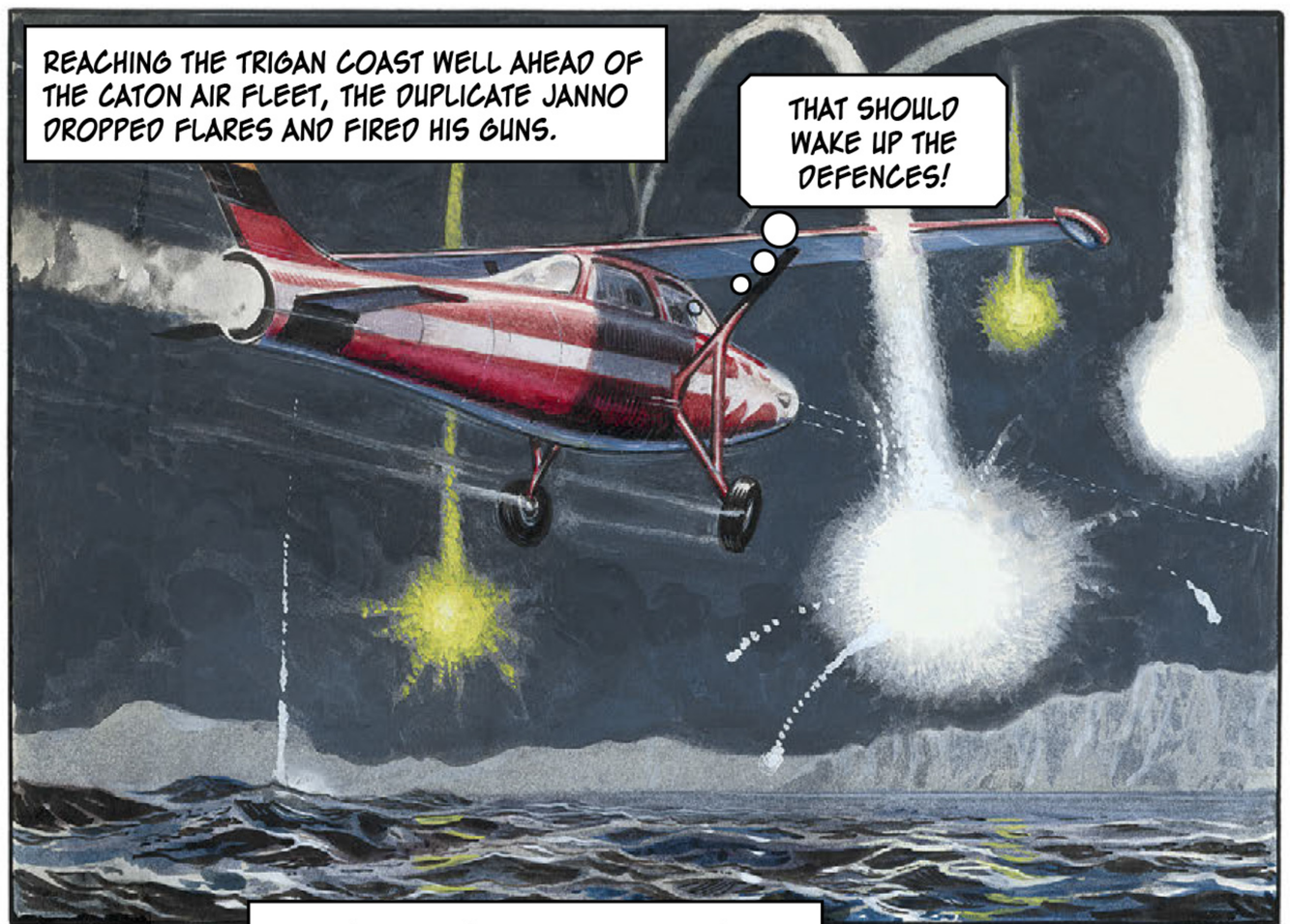

THE PILOT OF THE RULERS' AIRCRAFT...

...NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HIM!
UUUUUH...

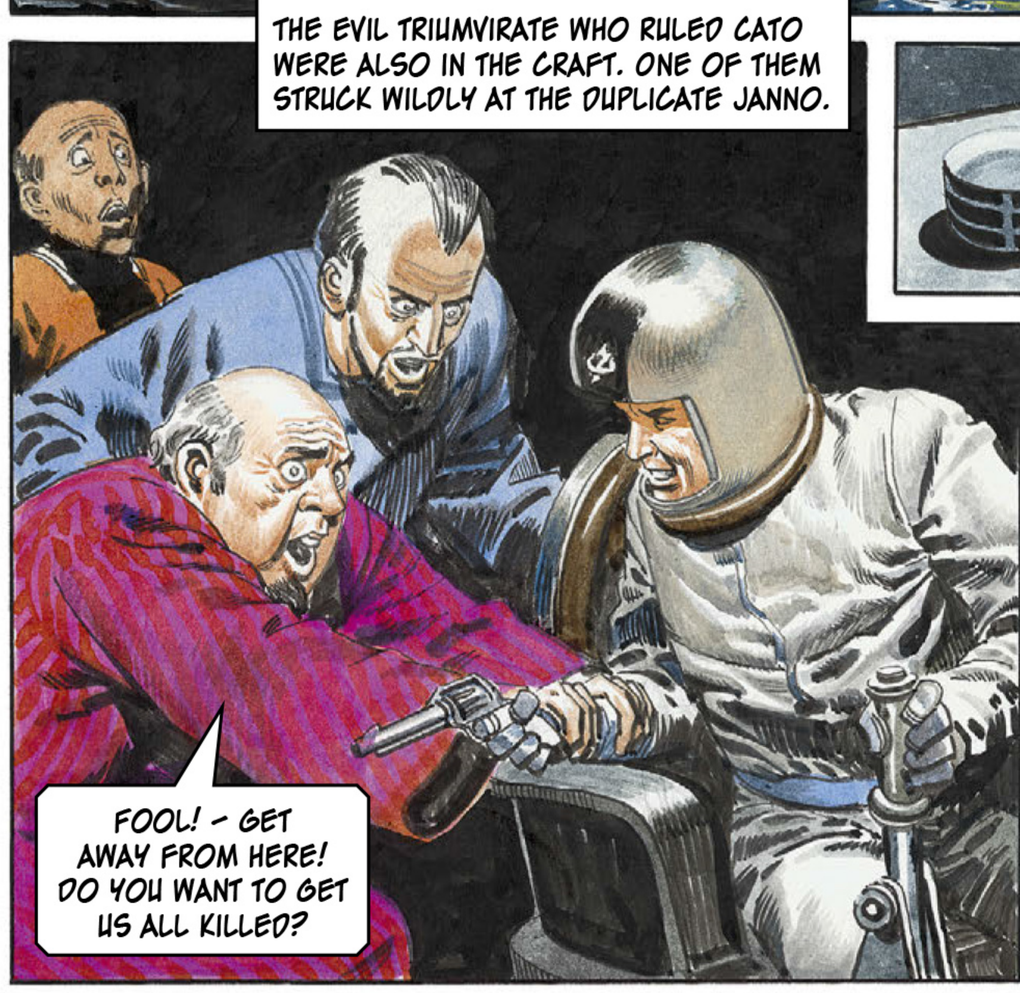

YOU WILL TAKE OFF NOW. I WILL GIVE YOU FURTHER ORDERS WHEN WE ARE IN THE AIR.
THE DUPLICATE JANNO SENT THE CRAFT STREAKING SKYWARDS WITH ALL THE SKILLS OF HIS ORIGINAL.
VERY GOOD, O MIGHTY ONE.


YOU WILL TAKE UP POSITION ABOVE THE AIR FLEET AND KEEP WELL BEHIND THEM. ON NO ACCOUNT ARE YOU TO TAKE ANY RISKS.
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK!


ONE JERK OF THE CONTROLS – AND THE CRAFT SCREAMED DOWN IN A BREATH-TAKING DIVE TO SEA LEVEL!
HAVE YOU TAKEN LEAVE OF YOUR SENSES?
FOOL! ARE YOU TRYING TO KILL US?
NOT A MOVE! – WE ARE HEADING STRAIGHT FOR TRIGAN CITY, TO RAISE THE ALARM! WHEN YOUR AIR FLEET ARRIVES OFF OUR COAST, IT WILL FLY INTO AN INFERNO OF FIRE AND FURY!


REACHING THE TRIGAN COAST WELL AHEAD OF THE CATON AIR FLEET, THE DUPLICATE JANNO DROPPED FLARES AND FIRED HIS GUNS.
THAT SHOULD WAKE UP THE DEFENCES!

A CEASE-FIRE WAS IN OPERATION, BUT THE TRIGAN COASTAL GUNNERS QUICKLY ROUSED THEMSELVES.
IT'S A CATON CRAFT! - SOUND THE ALARM! ACTION STATIONS!


THE EVIL TRIUMVIRATE WHO RULED CATO WERE ALSO IN THE CRAFT. ONE OF THEM STRUCK WILDLY AT THE DUPLICATE JANNO.
FOOL! - GET AWAY FROM HERE! DO YOU WANT TO GET US ALL KILLED?

WITH NO HAND ON THE CONTROLS, THE CRAFT SWERVED TOWARDS THE COAST.

OPEN FIRE!

MEANWHILE, THE ALARM HAD REACHED TRIGAN CITY – AND THE FIGHTING CRAFT OF THE AIR FLEET WERE SCREECHING UP INTO THE DAWN SKY.

ALL-UNSUSPECTING, THE CATON FLEET FLEW INTO A TRAP. WITH THE SUN BEHIND THEM, THE TRIGANS MAULED THEIR BLINDED ENEMIES TO TATTERS! THE WAR WAS OVER!

LATER THAT DAY, A TRIGAN NAVAL PATROL CRAFT FOUND AN UNCONSCIOUS FIGURE LYING ON THE SHORE OF A LONELY ISLET.

BY THE STARS! – IT'S LORD JANNO, THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW!

IN DUE COURSE, ROBI WAS BROUGHT FROM CATO AND QUESTIONED BY PERIC. HE CONFESSED HIS SECRET TO THE GREAT SCIENTIST.

I THINK HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY WILL AGREE WITH ME WHEN I SAY THAT YOUR EXECUTION OR IMPRISONMENT WILL ONLY DEPRIVE ELEKTON OF A BRAIN IT CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE. BUT THE INFERNAL DUPLICATING DEVICE WILL BE DESTROYED – AND YOU WILL SPEAK OF IT TO NO ONE!

NEVER, MASTER – I PROMISE YOU!

ONE THING PUZZLES ME PERIC – AM I THE REAL JANNO OR THE DUPLICATE. WHICH CRASH DID I SURVIVE? AND WHICH ME?

THAT WE MAY NEVER KNOW FOR SURE, LORD JANNO. YOUR MIND APPEARS TO BE A COMPLETE BLANK AS TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING UP TO THE CRASH – WHICHEVER ONE IT WAS.

A STATUE WAS ERECTED IN THE GREAT SQUARE OF TRIGAN CITY TO THE LORD JANNO WHO SAVED THE EMPIRE AT THE COST OF HIS OWN LIFE.

JANNO OFTEN PONDERED ON THE GREAT QUESTION MARK OF HIS LIFE.

AM I THE ORIGINAL ME – OR MY OWN DUPLICATE?

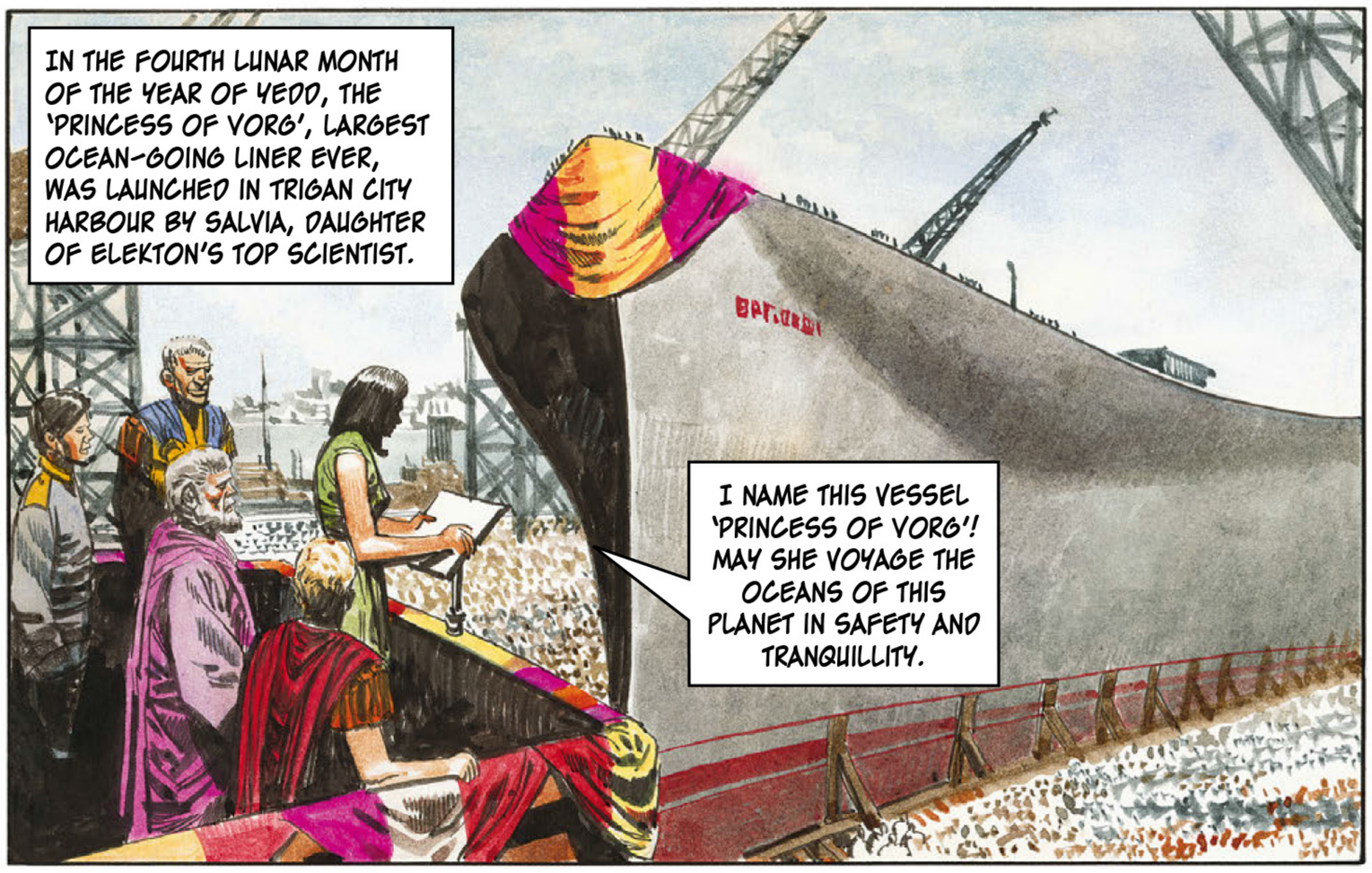
XXX

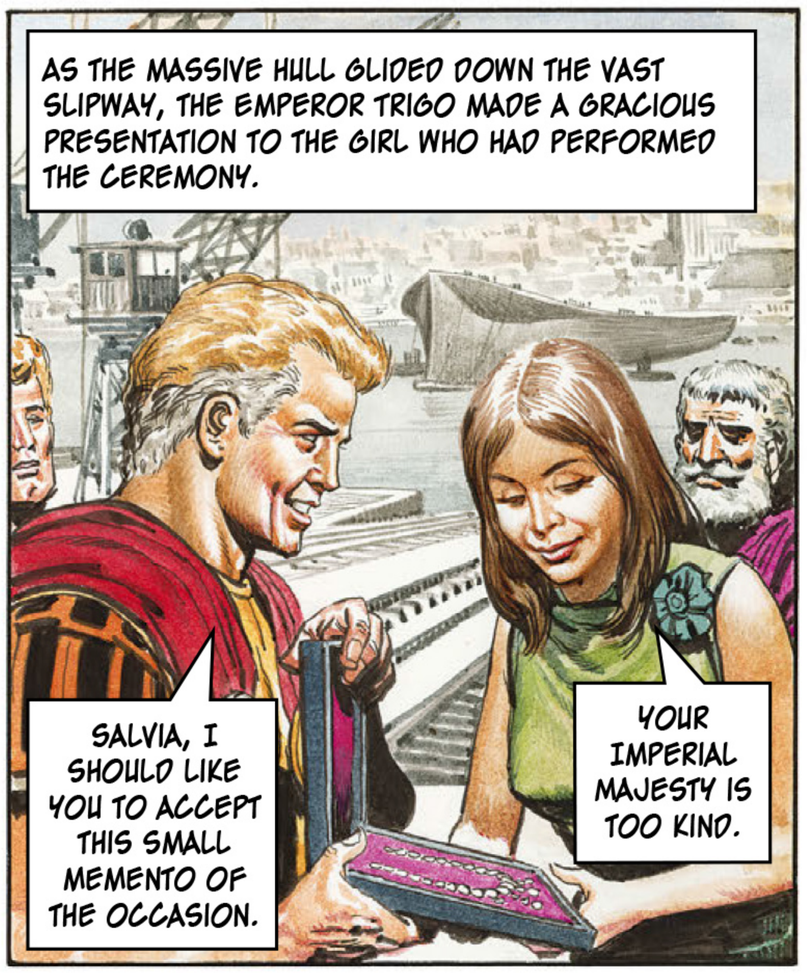
THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

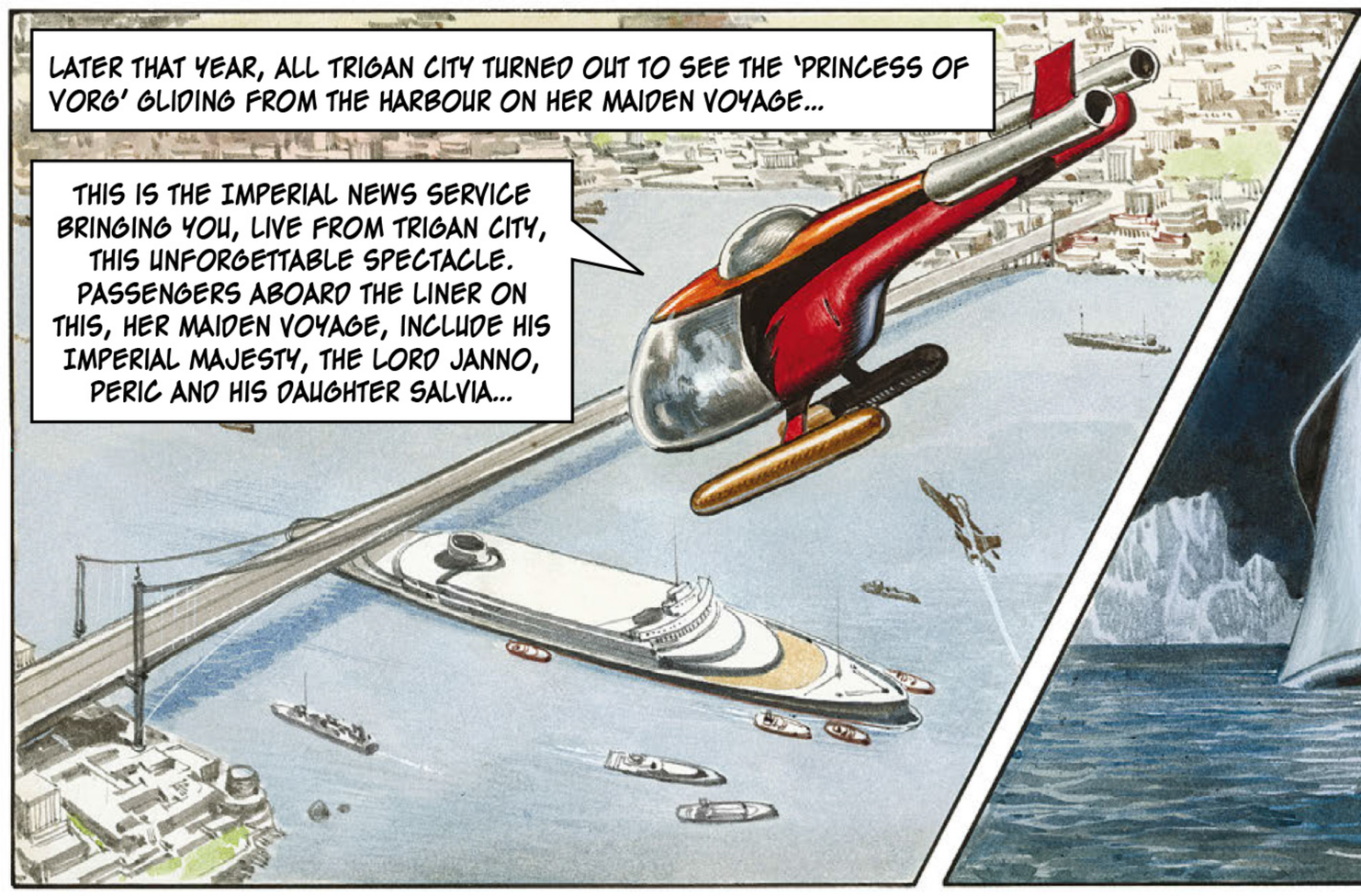
THE MASKED RAIDERS

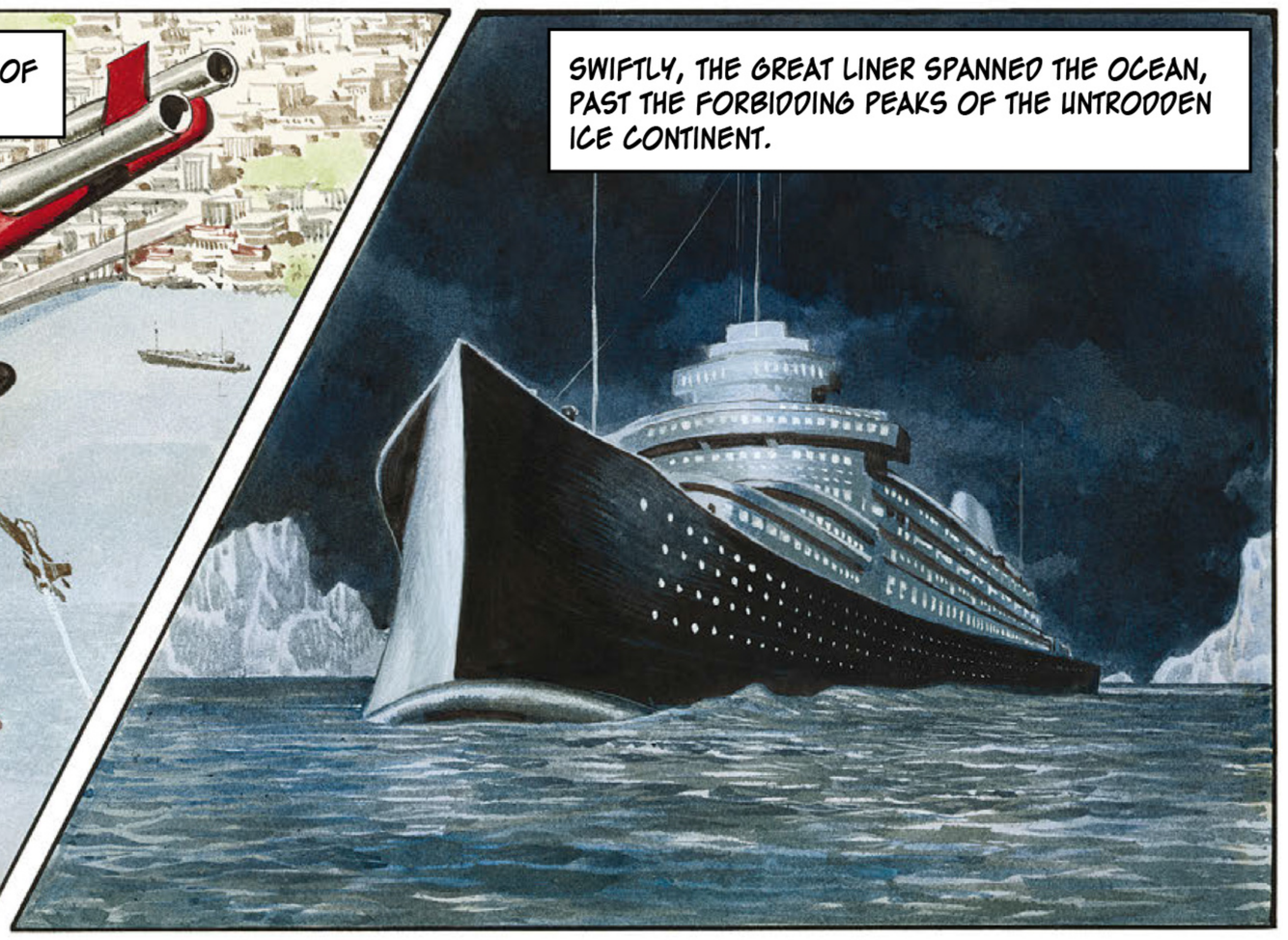
Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 506-516

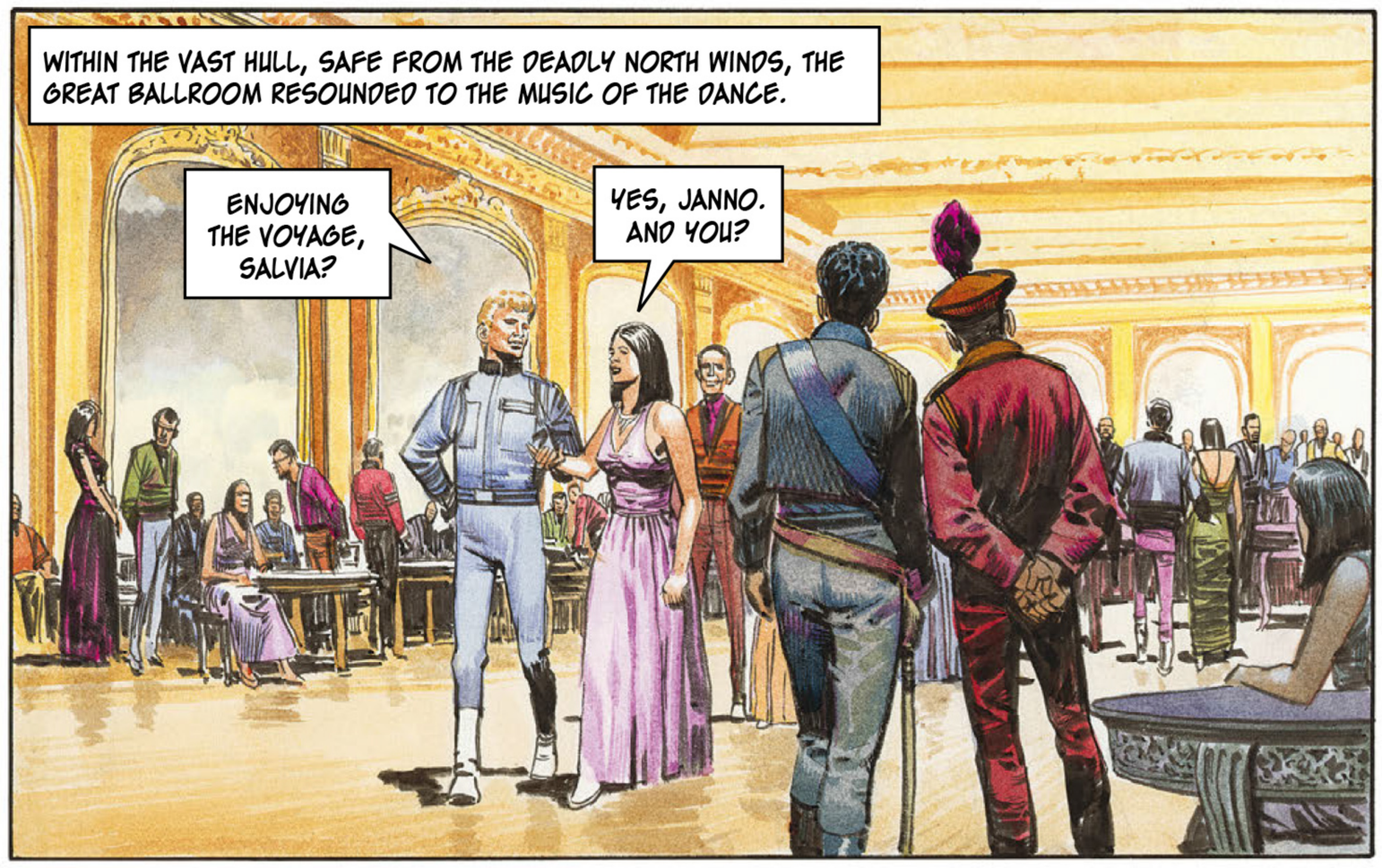
25th September 1971 – 4th December 1971


IN THE FOURTH LUNAR MONTH OF THE YEAR OF YEDO, THE 'PRINCESS OF VORG', LARGEST OCEAN-GOING LINER EVER, WAS LAUNCHED IN TRIGAN CITY HARBOUR BY SALVIA, DAUGHTER OF ELEKTON'S TOP SCIENTIST.
I NAME THIS VESSEL 'PRINCESS OF VORG'! MAY SHE VOYAGE THE OCEANS OF THIS PLANET IN SAFETY AND TRANQUILLITY.

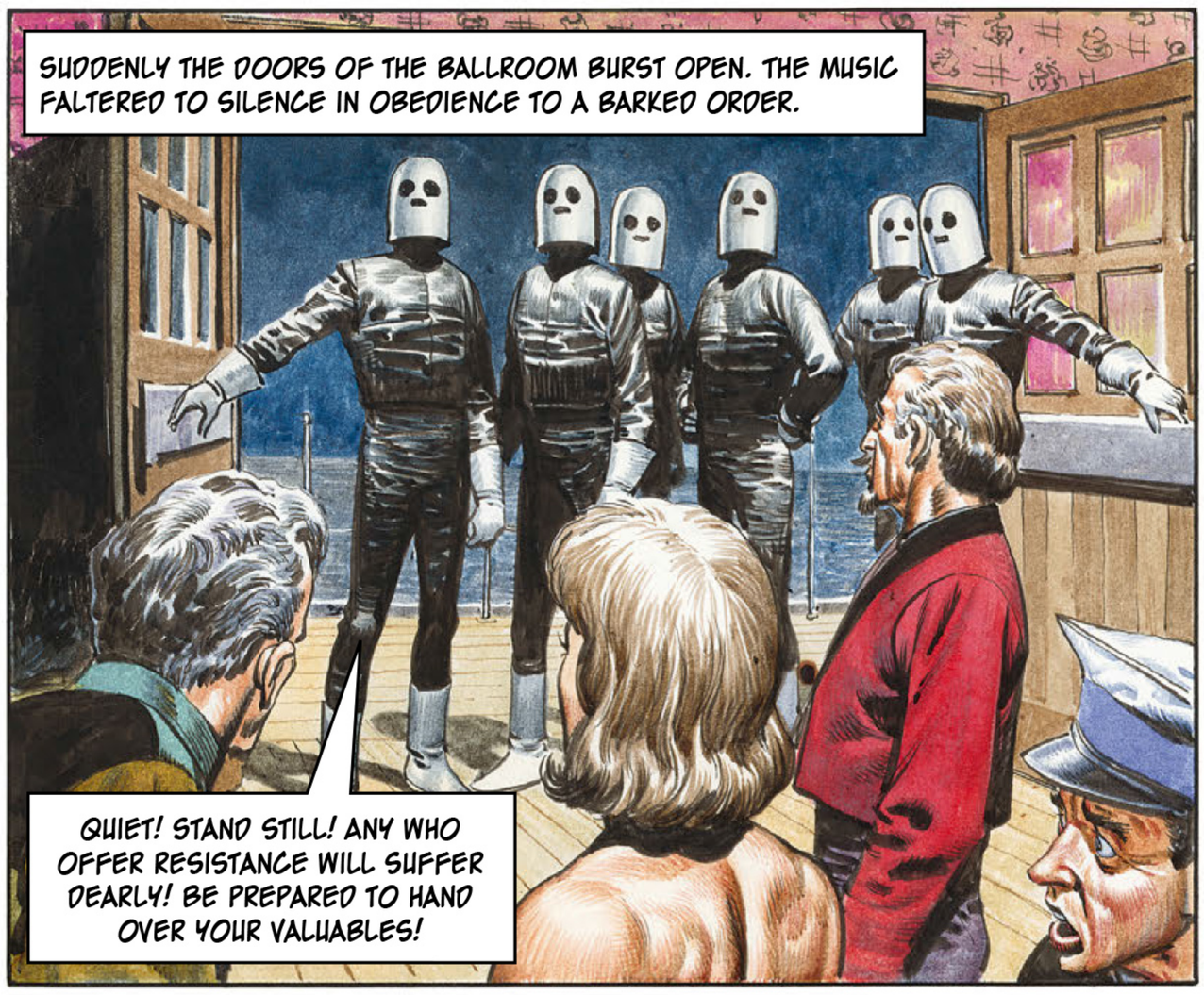

AS THE MASSIVE HULL GLIDED DOWN THE VAST SLIPWAY, THE EMPEROR TRIGO MADE A GRACIOUS PRESENTATION TO THE GIRL WHO HAD PERFORMED THE CEREMONY.
SALVIA, I SHOULD LIKE YOU TO ACCEPT THIS SMALL MEMENTO OF THE OCCASION.
YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY IS TOO KIND.

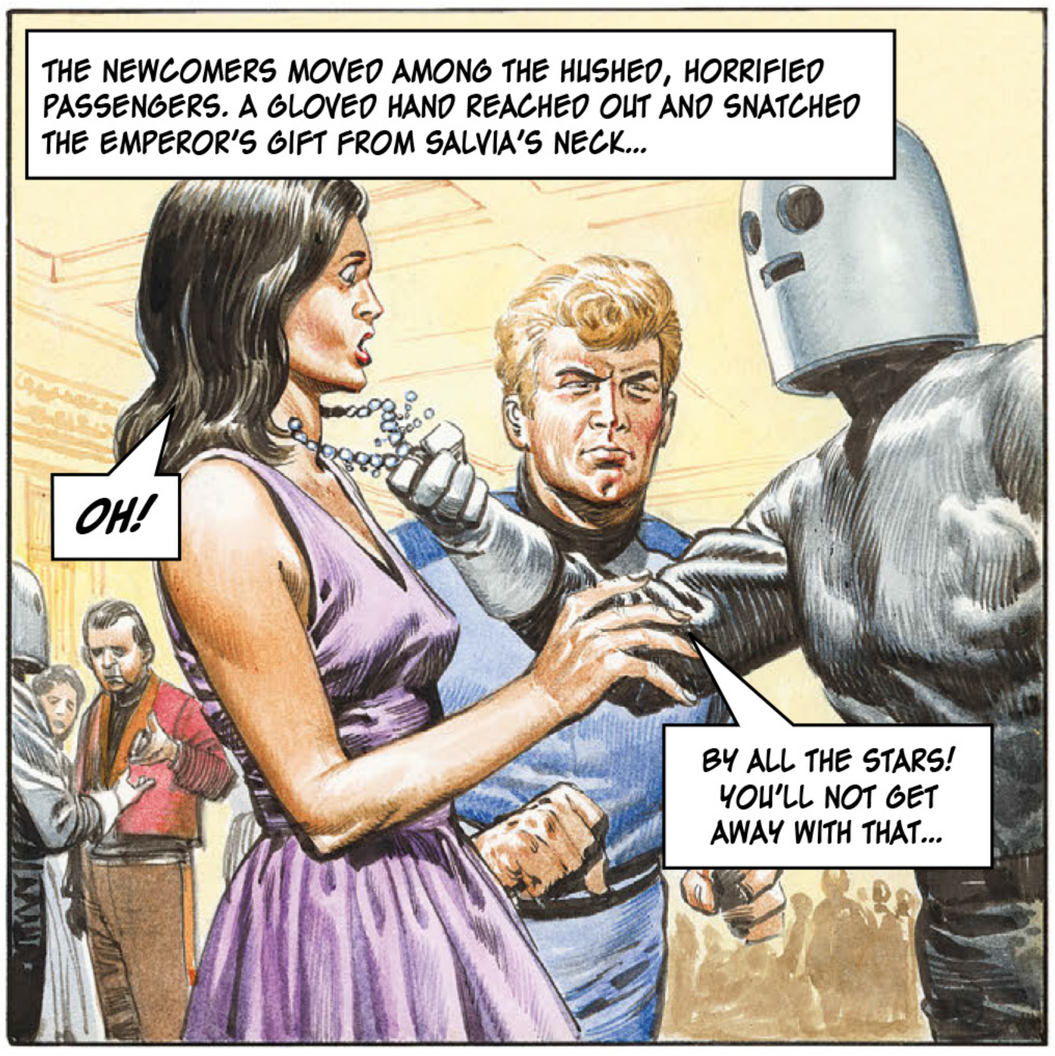

LATER THAT YEAR, ALL TRIGAN CITY TURNED OUT TO SEE THE 'PRINCESS OF VORG' GLIDING FROM THE HARBOUR ON HER MAIDEN VOYAGE...
THIS IS THE IMPERIAL NEWS SERVICE BRINGING YOU, LIVE FROM TRIGAN CITY, THIS UNFORGETTABLE SPECTACLE. PASSENGERS ABOARD THE LINER ON THIS, HER MAIDEN VOYAGE, INCLUDE HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, THE LORD JANNO, PERIC AND HIS DAUGHTER SALVIA...

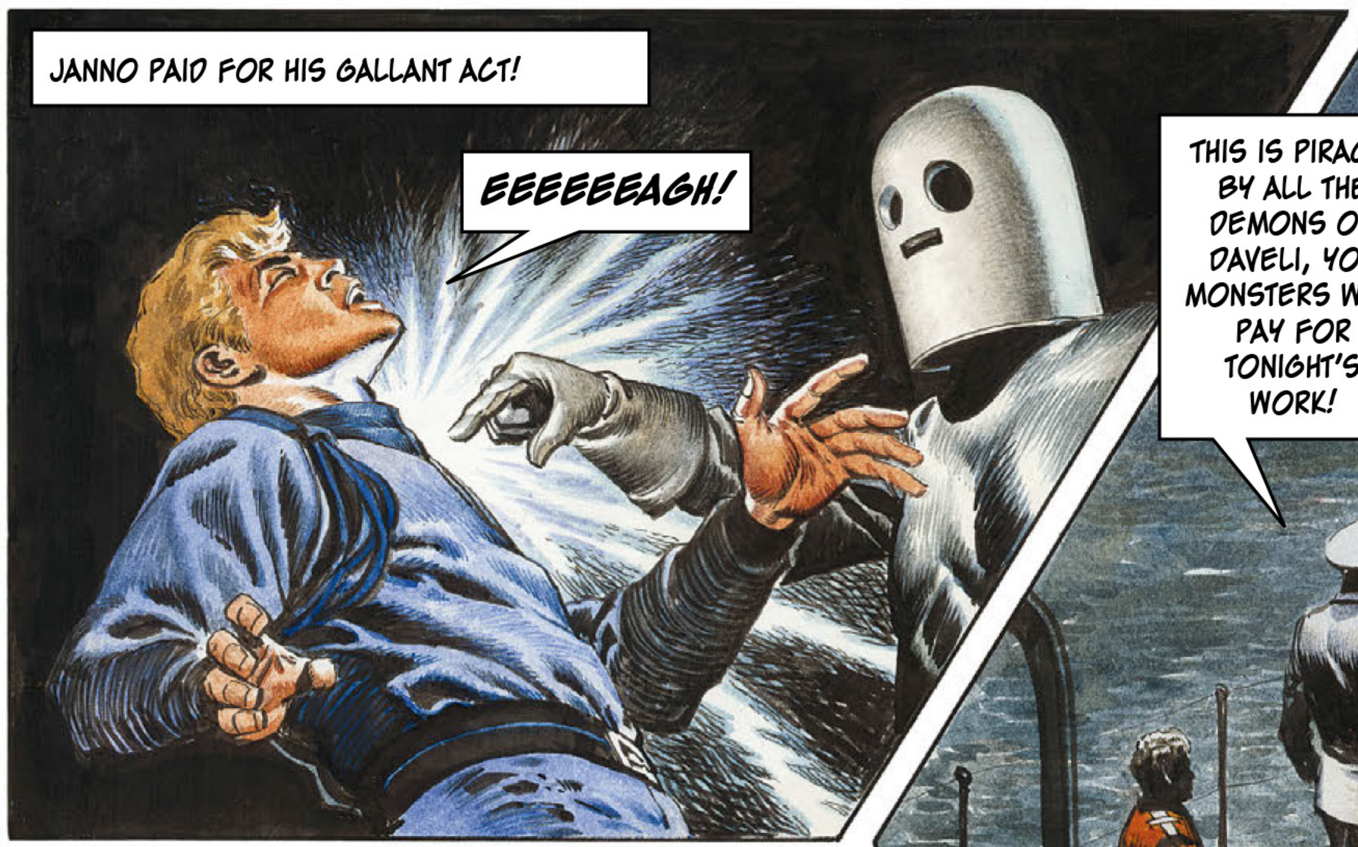

SWIFTLY, THE GREAT LINER SPANNED THE OCEAN, PAST THE FORBIDDING PEAKS OF THE UNTRODDEN ICE CONTINENT.

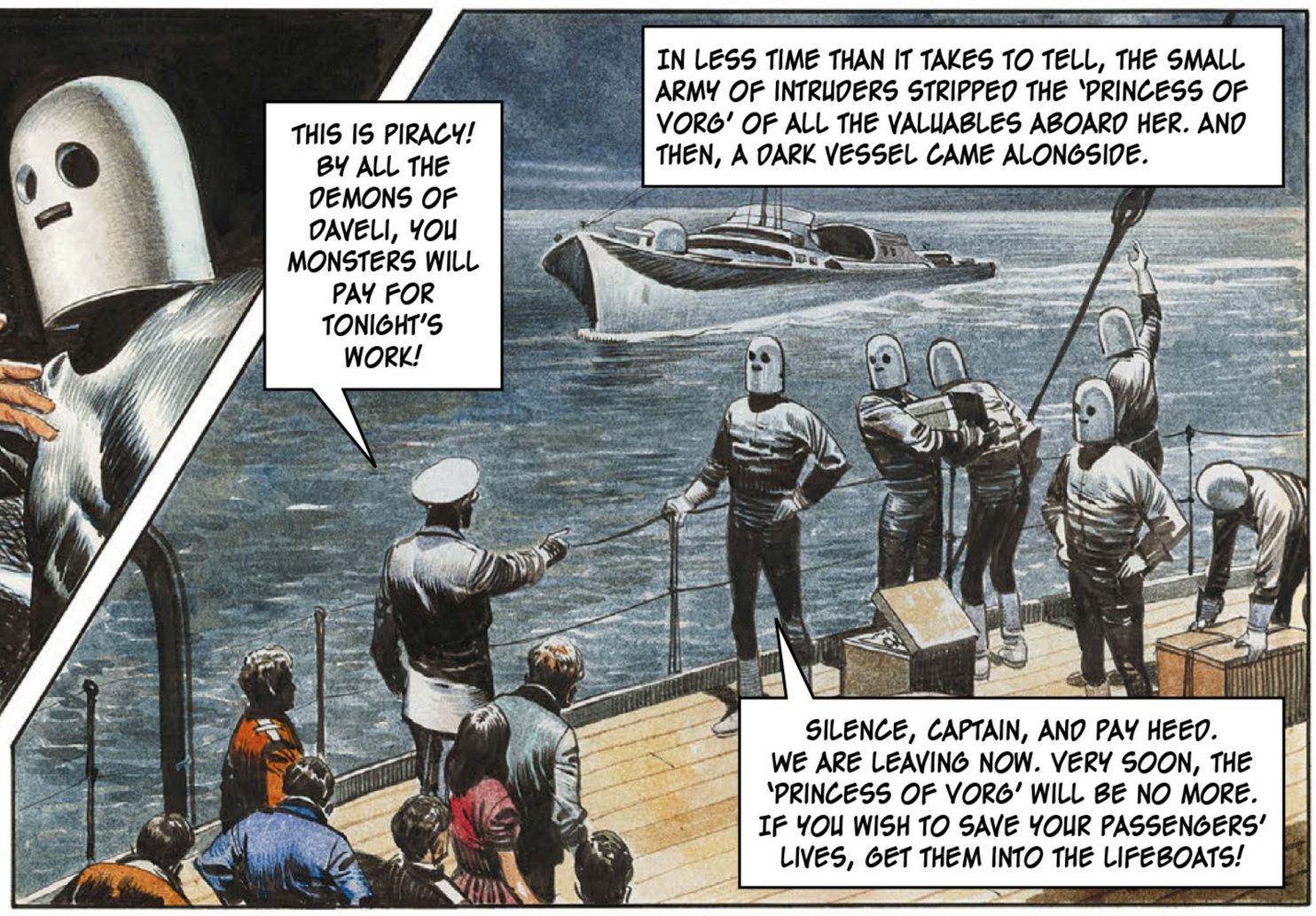

WITHIN THE VAST HULL, SAFE FROM THE DEADLY NORTH WINDS, THE GREAT BALLROOM RESOUNDED TO THE MUSIC OF THE DANCE.
ENJOYING THE VOYAGE, SALVIA?
YES, JANNO. AND YOU?

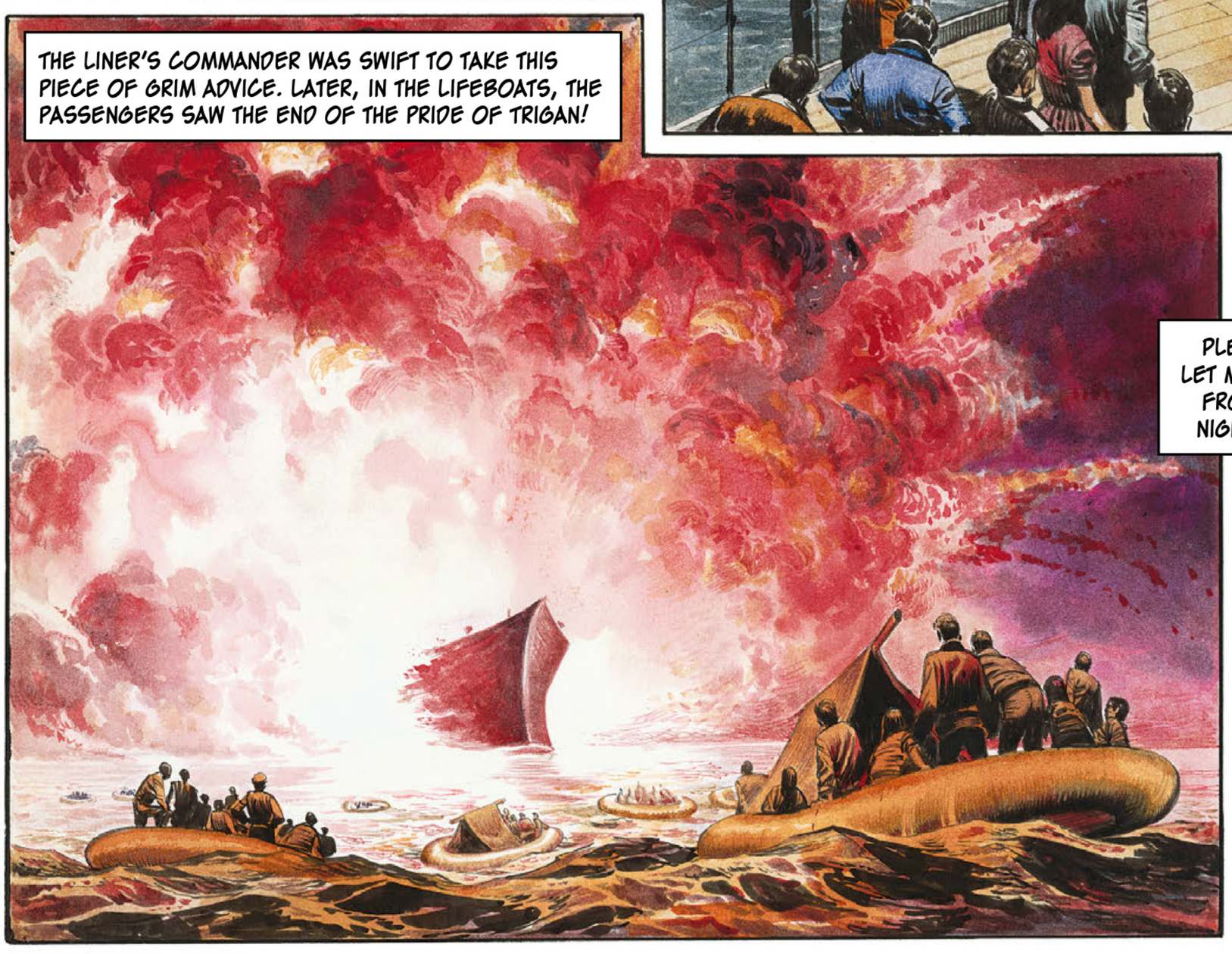
BUT DISASTER THREATENED! THE LINER'S HELMSMAN WAS THE FIRST TO SUFFER...


SUDDENLY THE DOORS OF THE BALLROOM BURST OPEN. THE MUSIC FALTERED TO SILENCE IN OBEDIENCE TO A BARKED ORDER.
QUIET! STAND STILL! ANY WHO OFFER RESISTANCE WILL SUFFER DEARLY! BE PREPARED TO HAND OVER YOUR VALUABLES!

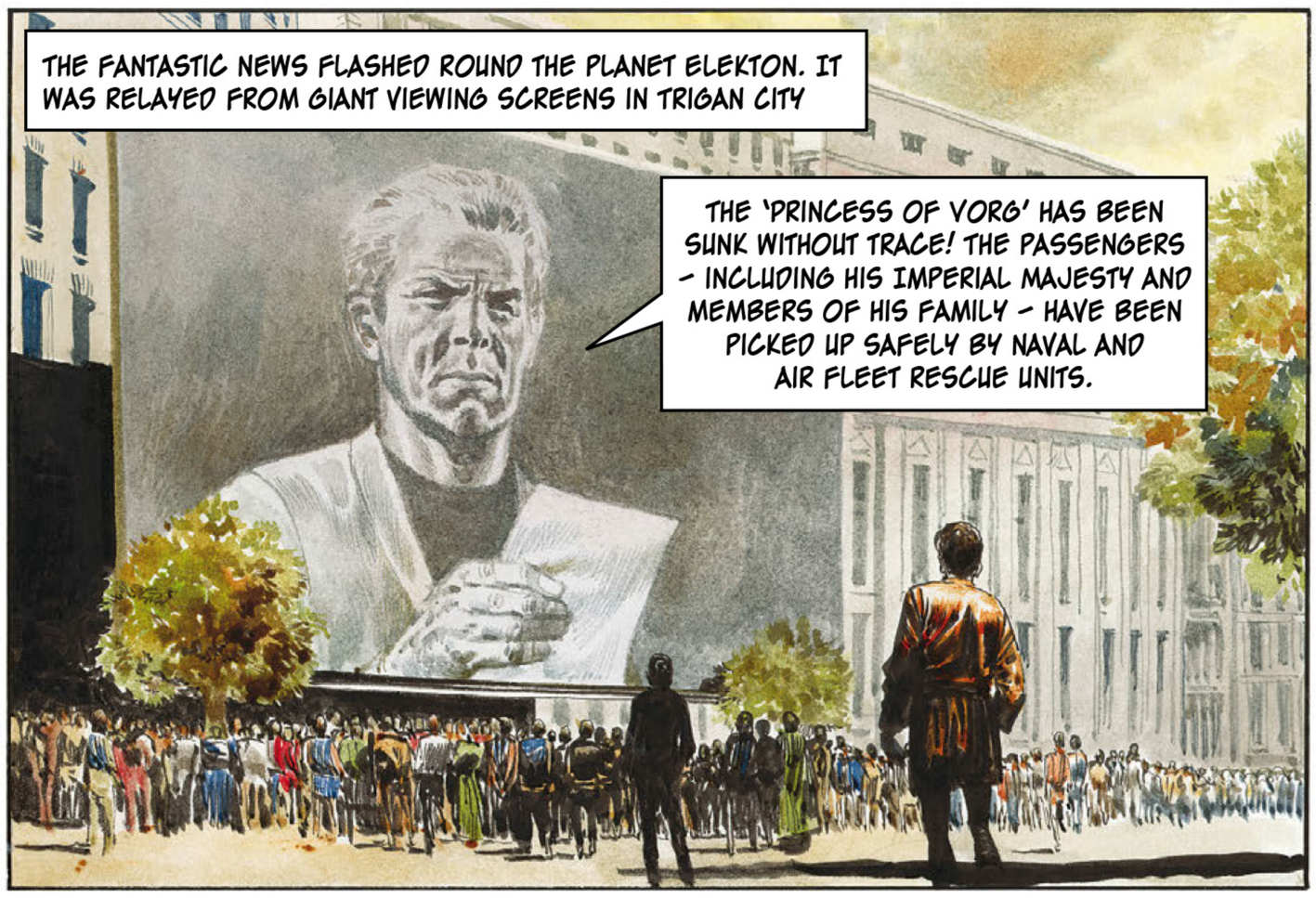

THE NEWCOMERS MOVED AMONG THE HUSHED, HORRIFIED PASSENGERS. A GLOVED HAND REACHED OUT AND SNATCHED THE EMPEROR'S GIFT FROM SALVIA'S NECK...
OH!
BY ALL THE STARS! YOU'LL NOT GET AWAY WITH THAT...


JANNO PAID FOR HIS GALLANT ACT!
EEEEEEAGH!

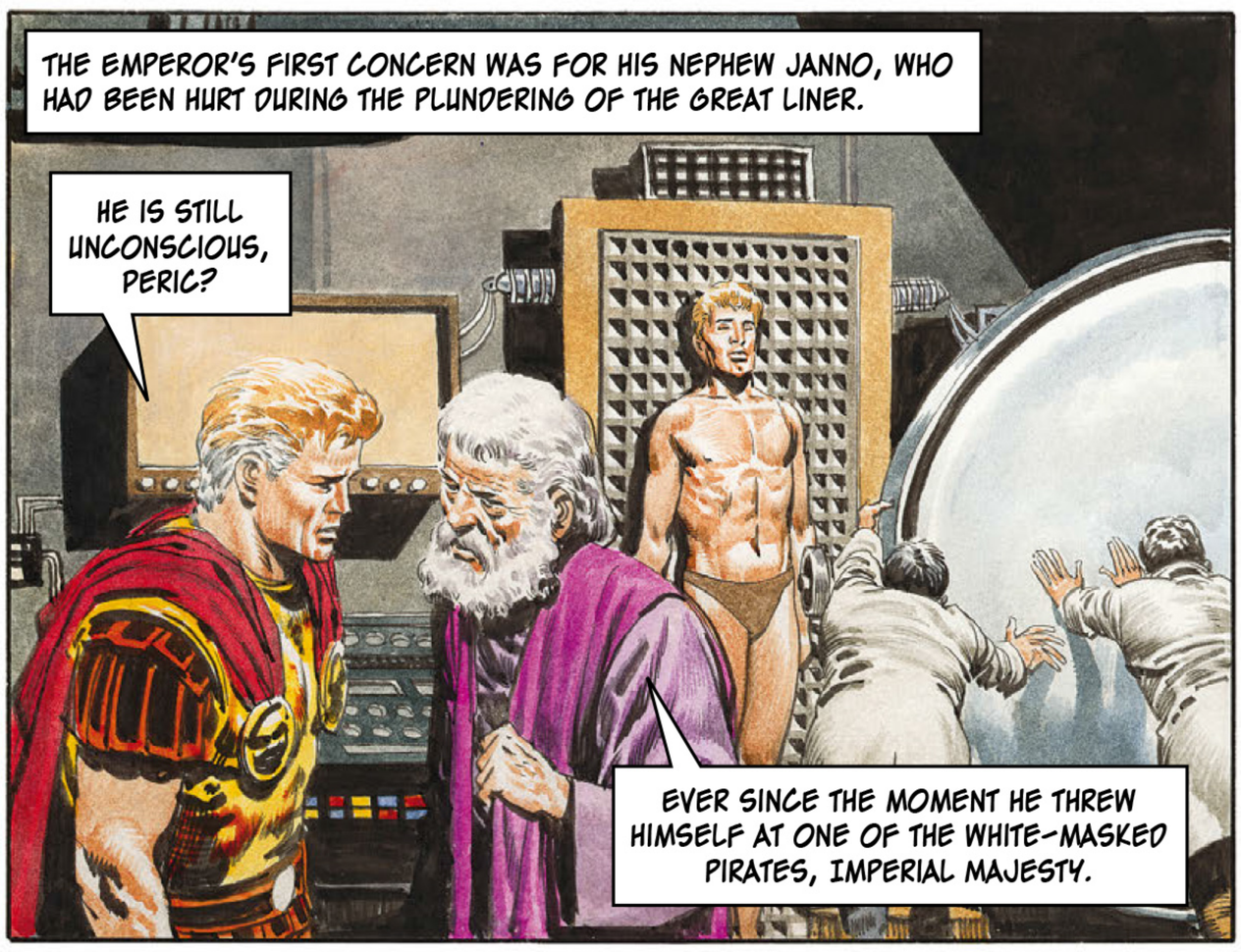

IN LESS TIME THAN IT TAKES TO TELL, THE SMALL ARMY OF INTRUDERS STRIPPED THE 'PRINCESS OF VORG' OF ALL THE VALUABLES ABOARD HER. AND THEN, A DARK VESSEL CAME ALONGSIDE.
THIS IS PIRACY! BY ALL THE DEMONS OF DAVELI, YOU MONSTERS WILL PAY FOR TONIGHT'S WORK!
SILENCE, CAPTAIN, AND PAY HEED. WE ARE LEAVING NOW. VERY SOON, THE 'PRINCESS OF VORG' WILL BE NO MORE. IF YOU WISH TO SAVE YOUR PASSENGERS' LIVES, GET THEM INTO THE LIFEBOATS!

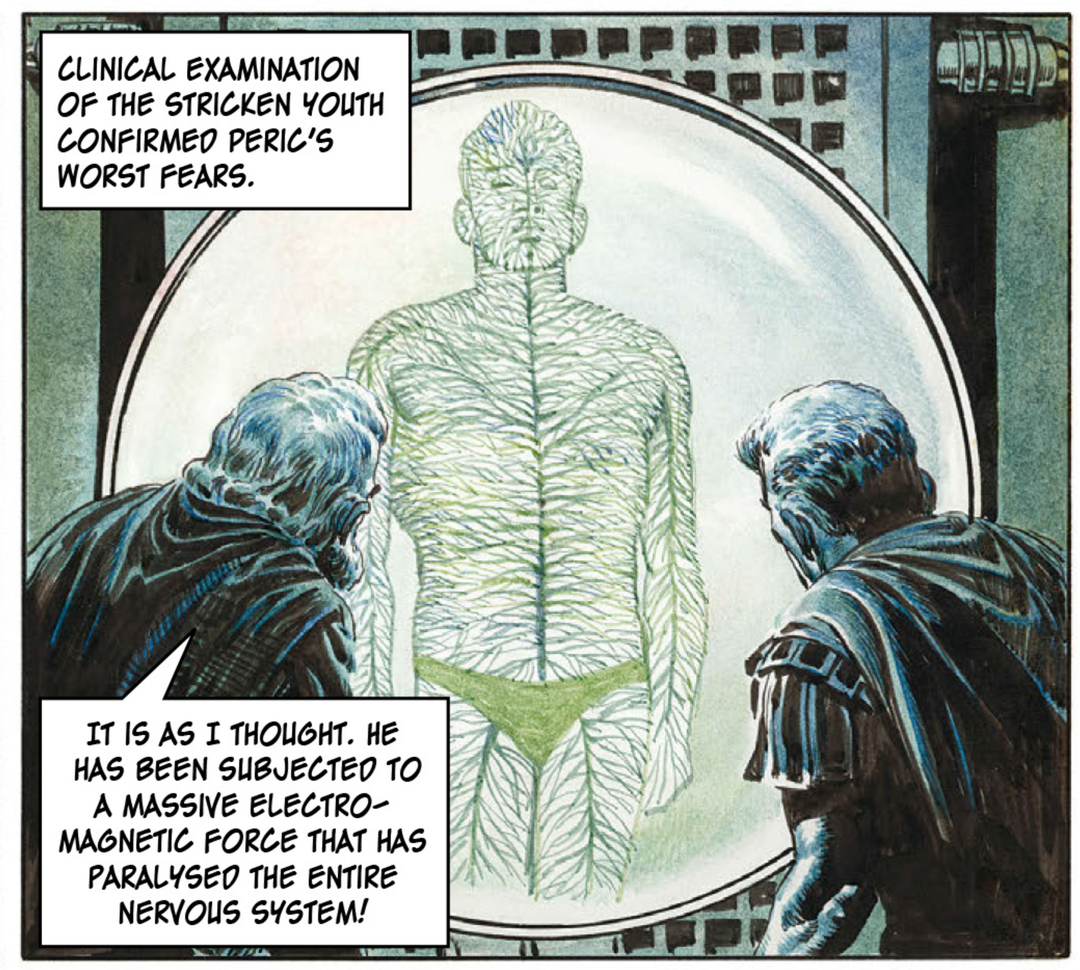

THE LINER'S COMMANDER WAS SWIFT TO TAKE THIS PIECE OF GRIM ADVICE. LATER, IN THE LIFEBOATS, THE PASSENGERS SAW THE END OF THE PRIDE OF TRIGAN!

ADRIFT IN THE WASTE OF ICY OCEAN! SALVIA CLUTCHED THE STRICKEN JANNO MORE TIGHTLY... AND SHUDDERED.
PLEASE ... LET ME AWAKE FROM THIS NIGHTMARE!

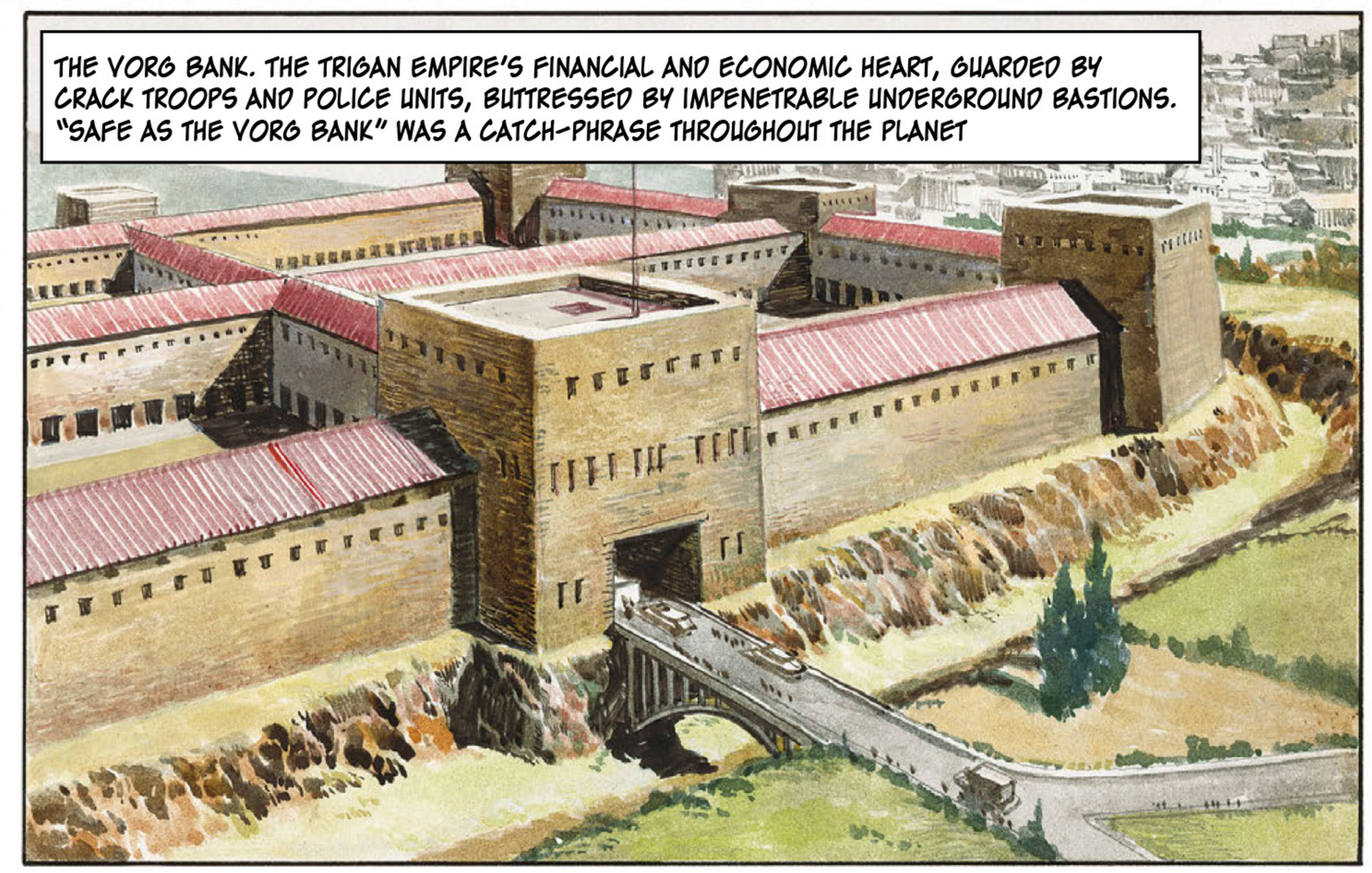

THE FANTASTIC NEWS FLASHED ROUND THE PLANET ELEKTON. IT WAS RELAYED FROM GIANT VIEWING SCREENS IN TRIGAN CITY
THE 'PRINCESS OF VORG' HAS BEEN SUNK WITHOUT TRACE! THE PASSENGERS – INCLUDING HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY – HAVE BEEN PICKED UP SAFELY BY NAVAL AND AIR FLEET RESCUE UNITS.

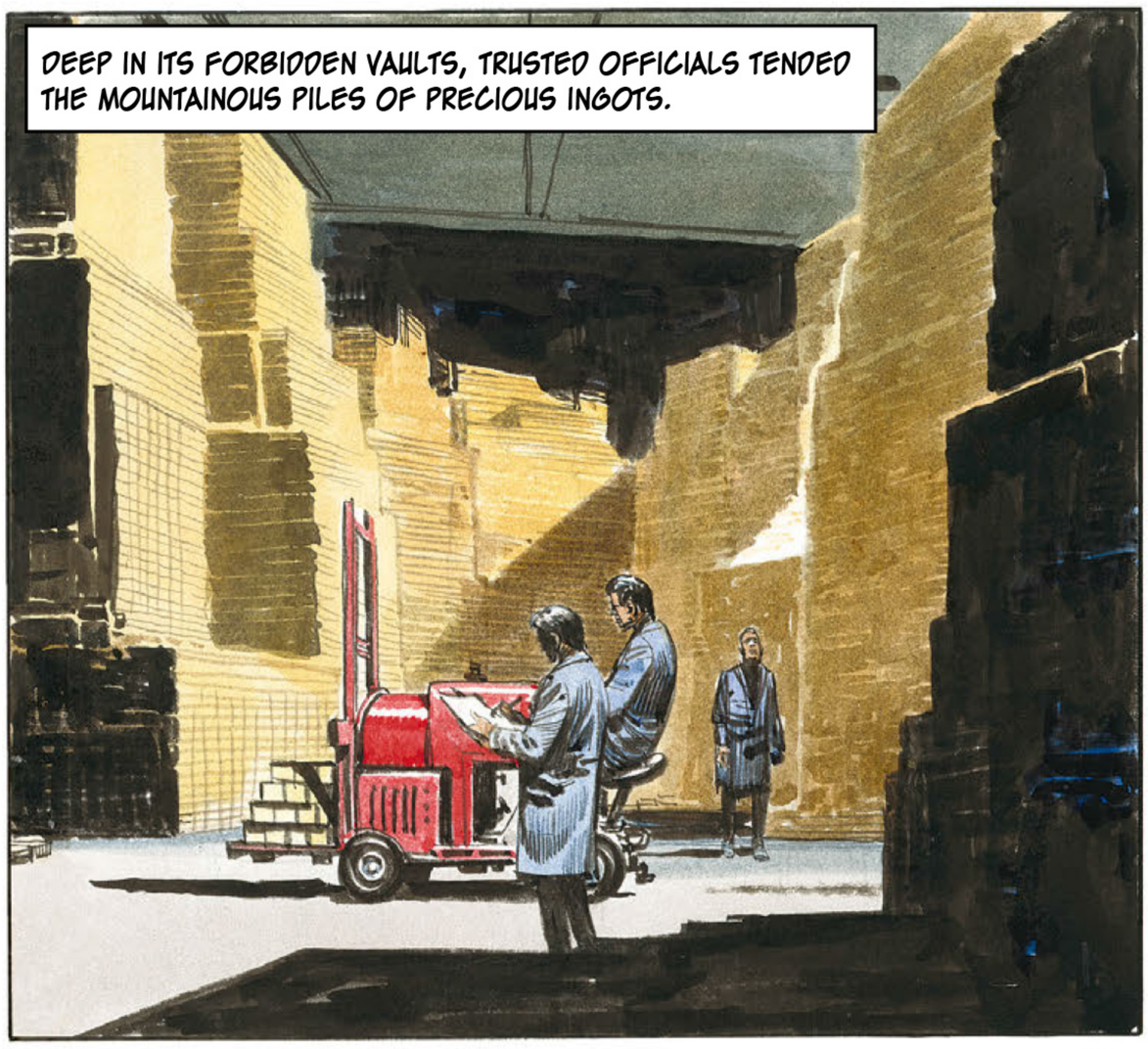
LATER THAT DAY, THE EMPEROR TRIGO LANDED FROM A RESCUE CRAFT AND GAVE A SOLEMN OATH TO HIS PEOPLE.
WAS IT AN ACT OF PIRACY, IMPERIAL MAJESTY?
IT WAS! AND I SHALL NOT REST TILL THE MONSTERS WHO PERPETUATED THE OUTRAGE HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO JUSTICE!


THE EMPEROR'S FIRST CONCERN WAS FOR HIS NEPHEW JANNO, WHO HAD BEEN HURT DURING THE PLUNDERING OF THE GREAT LINER.
HE IS STILL UNCONSCIOUS, PERIC?
EVER SINCE THE MOMENT HE THREW HIMSELF AT ONE OF THE WHITE-MASKED PIRATES, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.


CLINICAL EXAMINATION OF THE STRICKEN YOUTH CONFIRMED PERIC'S WORST FEARS.
IT IS AS I THOUGHT. HE HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO A MASSIVE ELECTRO-MAGNETIC FORCE THAT HAS PARALYSED THE ENTIRE NERVOUS SYSTEM!

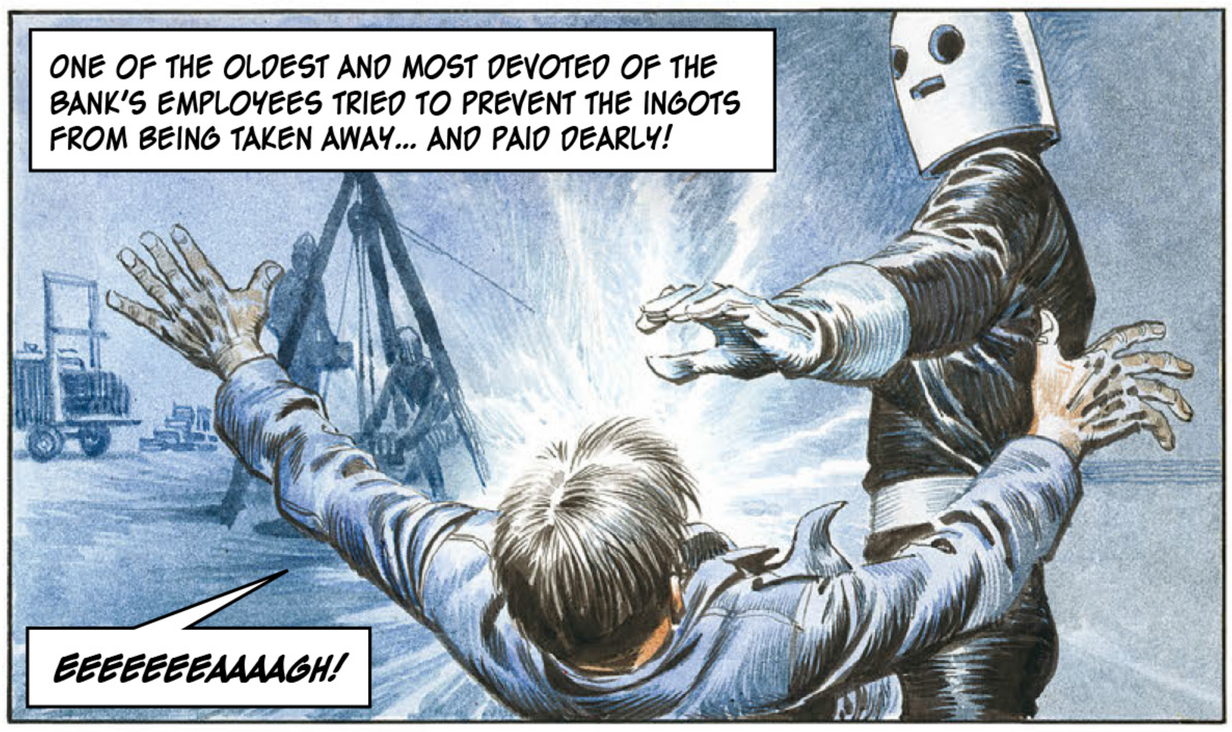
WILL MY NEPHEW LIVE?
IMPERIAL MAJESTY, AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME... I CANNOT TELL!

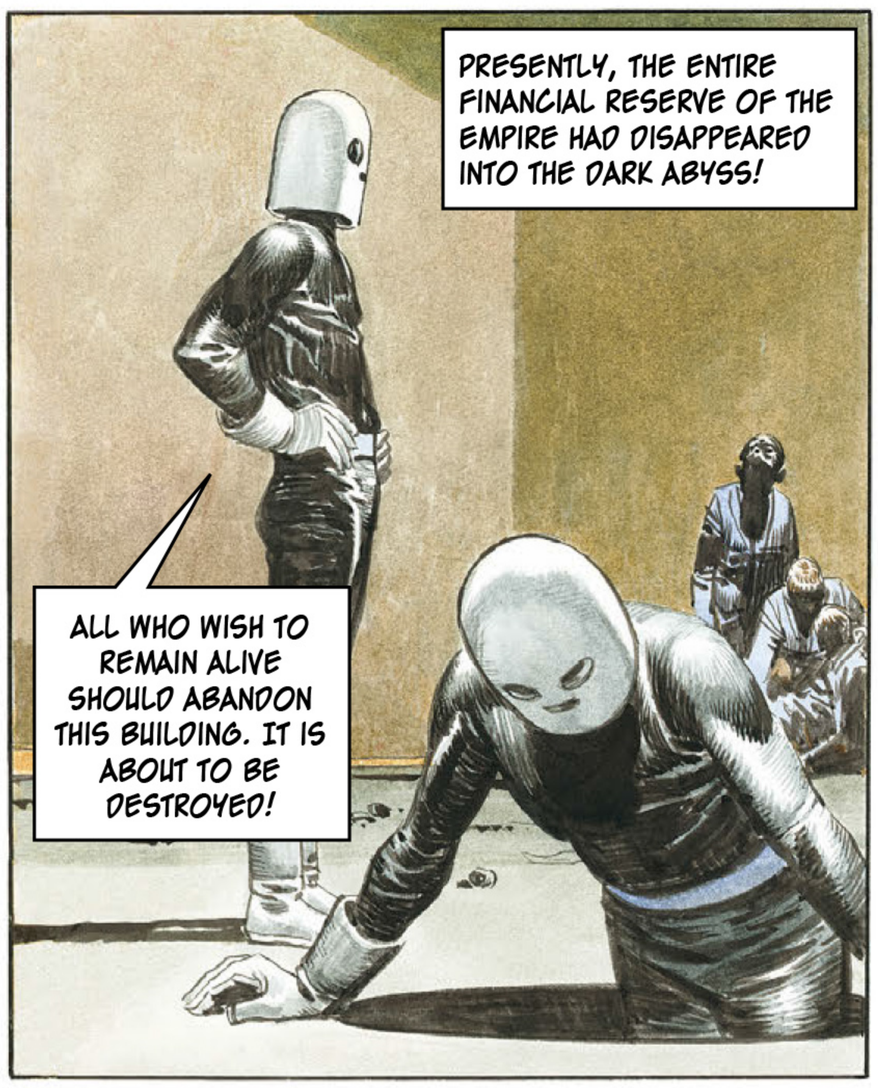

THE VORG BANK. THE TRIGAN EMPIRE'S FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC HEART, GUARDED BY CRACK TROOPS AND POLICE UNITS, BUTTRESSED BY IMPENETRABLE UNDERGROUND BASTIONS. "SAFE AS THE VORG BANK" WAS A CATCH-PHRASE THROUGHOUT THE PLANET


DEEP IN ITS FORBIDDEN VAULTS, TRUSTED OFFICIALS TENDED THE MOUNTAINOUS PILES OF PRECIOUS INGOTS.

SUDDENLY...
BY ALL THE STARS! LOOK!
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING?

MOMENTS LATER, A MERCILESS VOICE RASPED THROUGH THE VAULT.
STAY WHERE YOU ARE! ATTEMPT NO RESISTANCE!

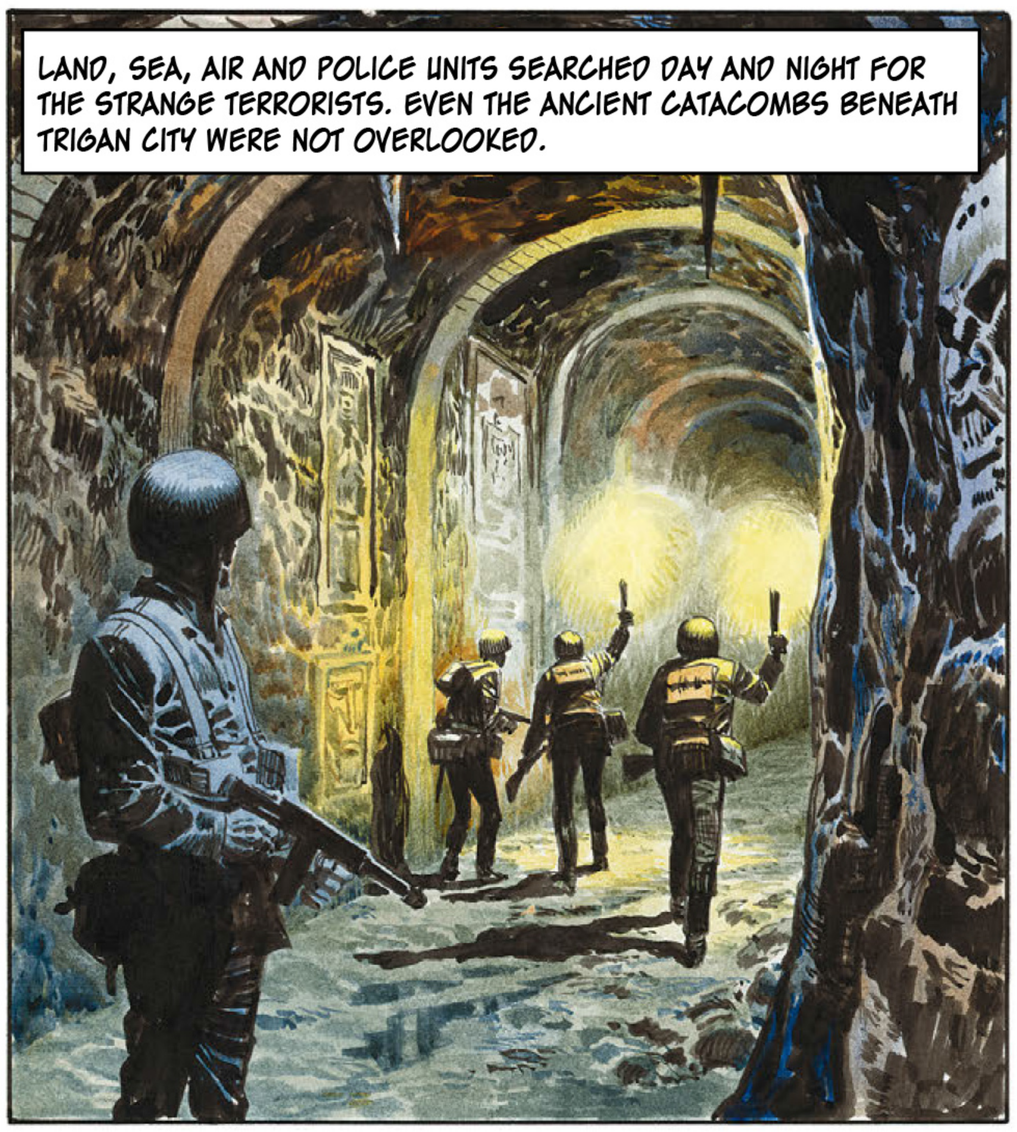

ONE OF THE OLDEST AND MOST DEVOTED OF THE BANK'S EMPLOYEES TRIED TO PREVENT THE INGOTS FROM BEING TAKEN AWAY... AND PAID DEARLY!
EEEEEEEEAAAAGH!

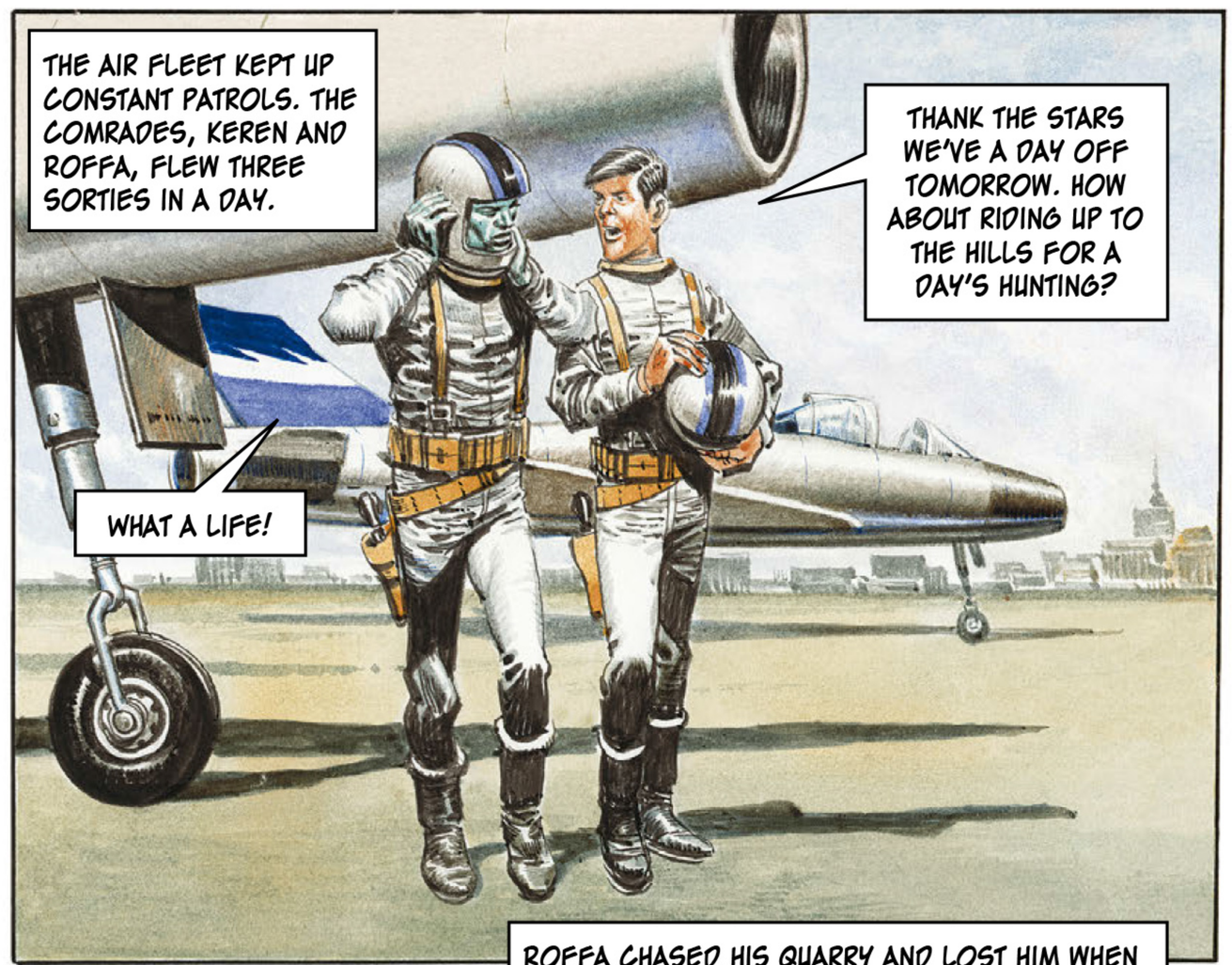

PRESENTLY, THE ENTIRE FINANCIAL RESERVE OF THE EMPIRE HAD DISAPPEARED INTO THE DARK ABYSS!
ALL WHO WISH TO REMAIN ALIVE SHOULD ABANDON THIS BUILDING. IT IS ABOUT TO BE DESTROYED!

SHORTLY BEFORE THE TWIN SUNS OF ELEKTON DIPPED BELOW THE HORIZON, THE VORG BANK DISINTEGRATED IN A MUSHROOM-SHAPED CLOUD THAT DEVASTATED A LARGE SECTION OF THE CITY! THE WHITE MASKED INTRUDERS HAD STRUCK AGAIN!

THE EMPEROR WAS BESIDE HIMSELF WITH FURY!
A WHOLE LUNAR MONTH GONE BY AND NOTHING DONE! YOU ARE A PACK OF BUNGLING FOOLS!

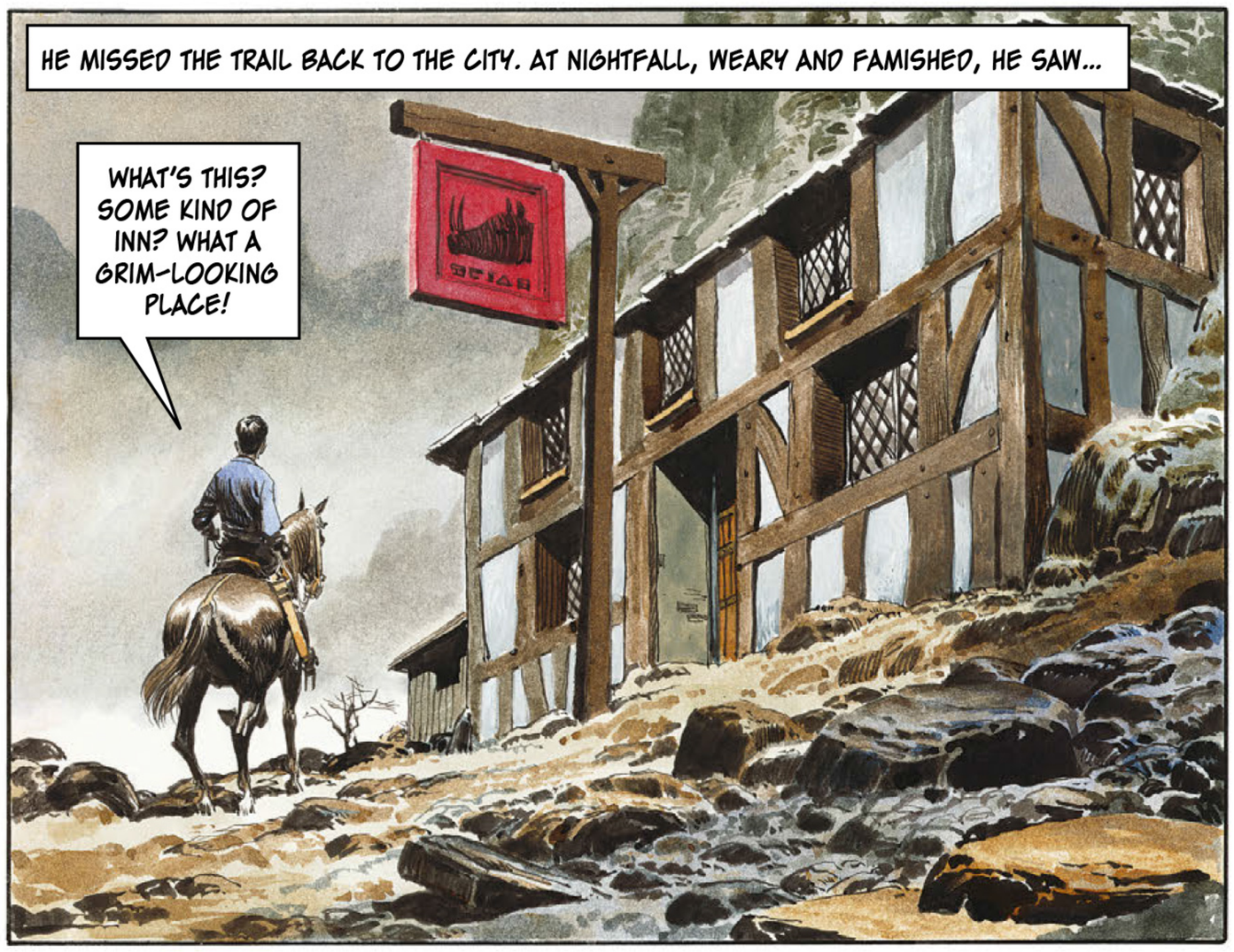
THE SERVICE AND CIVIL CHIEFS OF THE EMPIRE QUAILED BEFORE TRIGO'S LASHING TONGUE...
BUT, IMPERIAL MAJESTY...
NO BUTS! THOSE WHITE-MASKED MONSTERS MUST BE BOUGHT TO JUSTICE! AND EVERY INCH OF THE EMPIRE, ABOVE AND BELOW GROUND, IN THE SEA AND UNDER THE SEA, MUST BE SCOURED TILL THEY ARE FOUND! SEE TO IT!

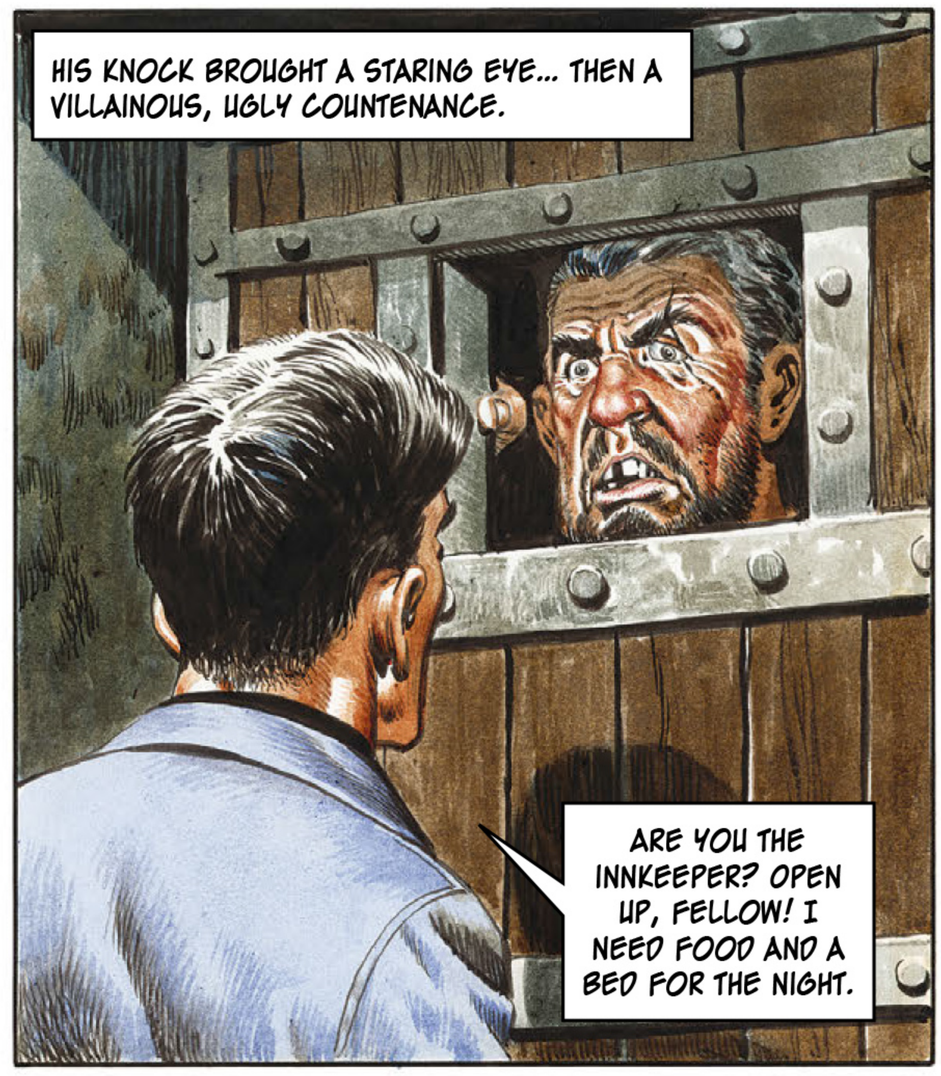

LAND, SEA, AIR AND POLICE UNITS SEARCHED DAY AND NIGHT FOR THE STRANGE TERRORISTS. EVEN THE ANCIENT CATACOMBS BENEATH TRIGAN CITY WERE NOT OVERLOOKED.

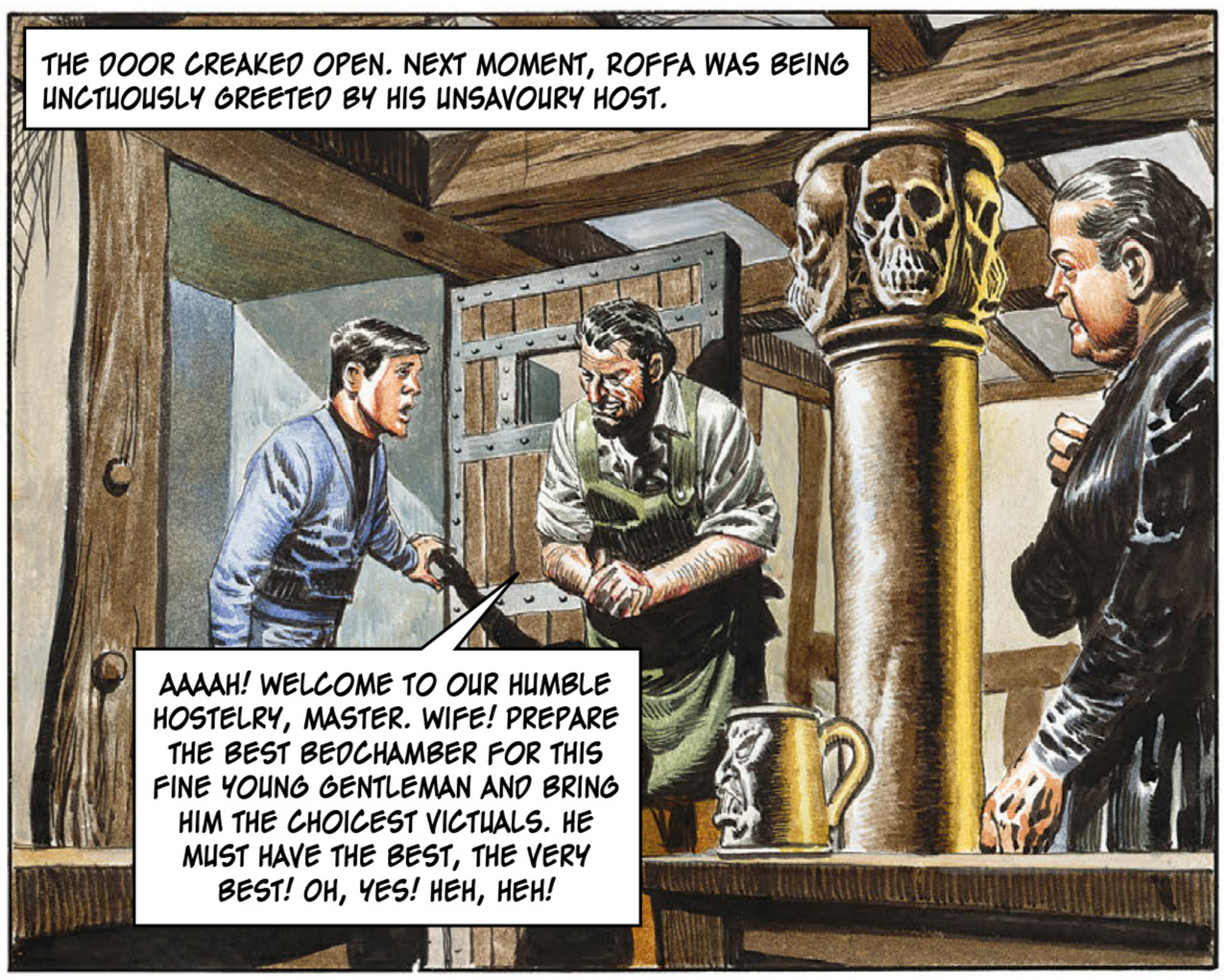

THE AIR FLEET KEPT UP CONSTANT PATROLS. THE COMRADES, KEREN AND ROFFA, FLEW THREE SORTIES IN A DAY.
THANK THE STARS WE'VE A DAY OFF TOMORROW. HOW ABOUT RIDING UP TO THE HILLS FOR A DAY'S HUNTING?
WHAT A LIFE!

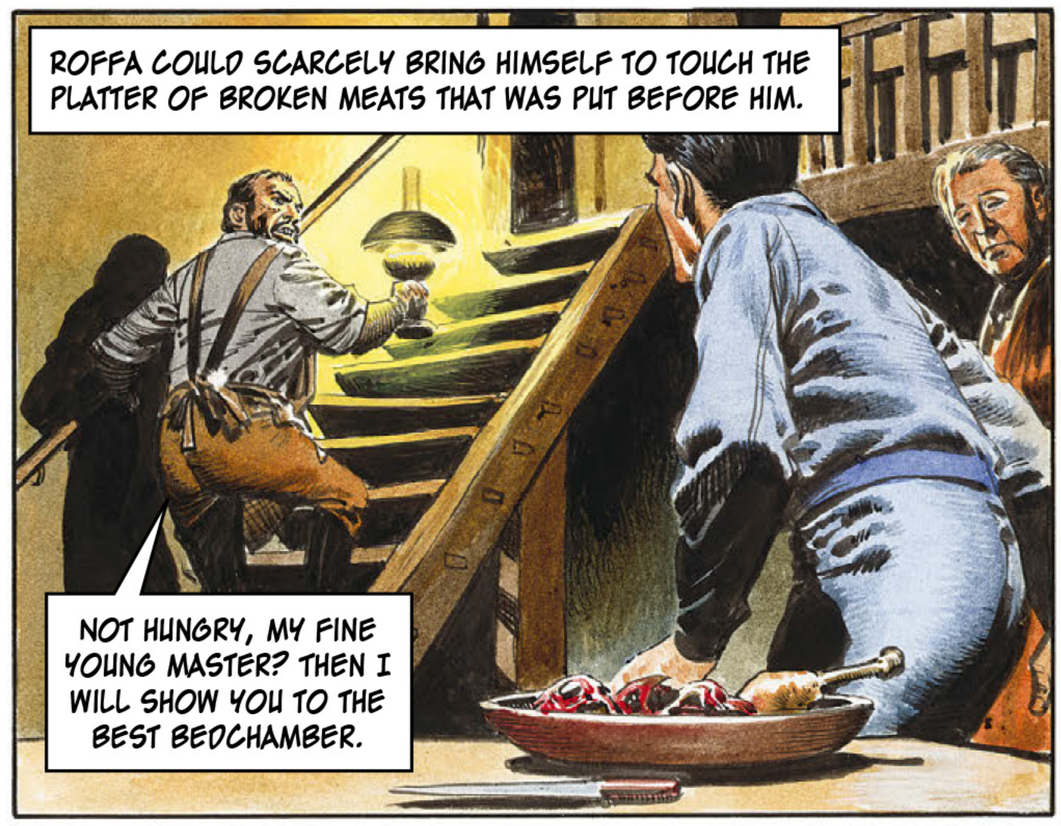
AND SO, NEXT DAY...
HE'S YOURS, ROFFA! AFTER HIM!

ROFFA CHASED HIS QUARRY AND LOST HIM WHEN THE MIST CLOSED DOWN. IT SOON BECAME APPARENT THAT HE HAD ALSO LOST HIS FRIEND.
KEREN! KEREN! WHERE ARE YOU?


HE MISSED THE TRAIL BACK TO THE CITY. AT NIGHTFALL, WEARY AND FAMISHED, HE SAW...
WHAT'S THIS? SOME KIND OF INN? WHAT A GRIM-LOOKING PLACE!


HIS KNOCK BROUGHT A STARING EYE... THEN A VILLAINOUS, UGLY COUNTENANCE.
ARE YOU THE INNKEEPER? OPEN UP, FELLOW! I NEED FOOD AND A BED FOR THE NIGHT.


THE DOOR CREAKED OPEN. NEXT MOMENT, ROFFA WAS BEING UNCTUOUSLY GREETED BY HIS UNSAVOURY HOST.
AAAAH! WELCOME TO OUR HUMBLE HOSTELRY, MASTER. WIFE! PREPARE THE BEST BEDCHAMBER FOR THIS FINE YOUNG GENTLEMAN AND BRING HIM THE CHOICEST VICTUALS. HE MUST HAVE THE BEST, THE VERY BEST! OH, YES! HEH, HEH!

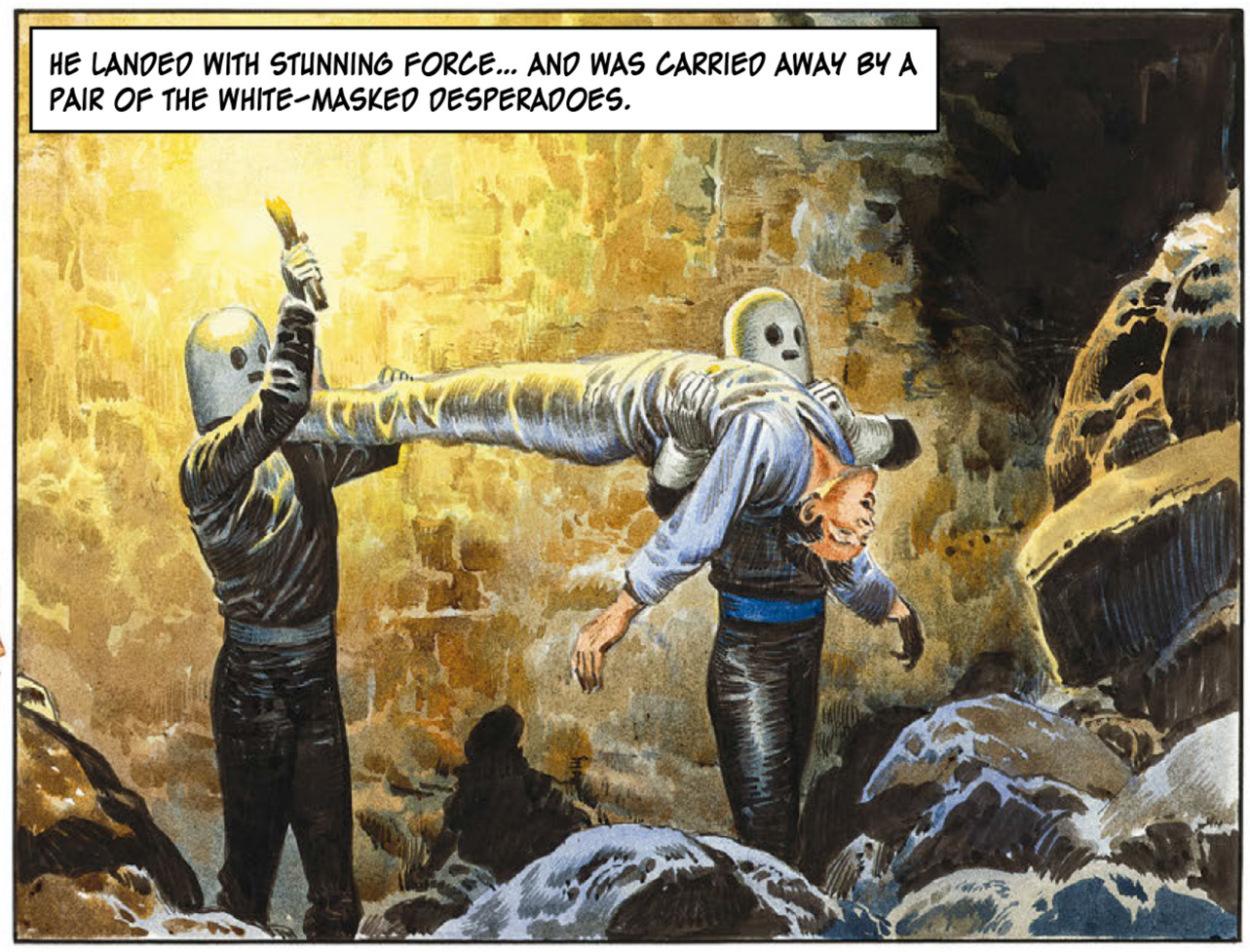

ROFFA COULD SCARCELY BRING HIMSELF TO TOUCH THE PLATTER OF BROKEN MEATS THAT WAS PUT BEFORE HIM.
NOT HUNGRY, MY FINE YOUNG MASTER? THEN I WILL SHOW YOU TO THE BEST BEDCHAMBER.

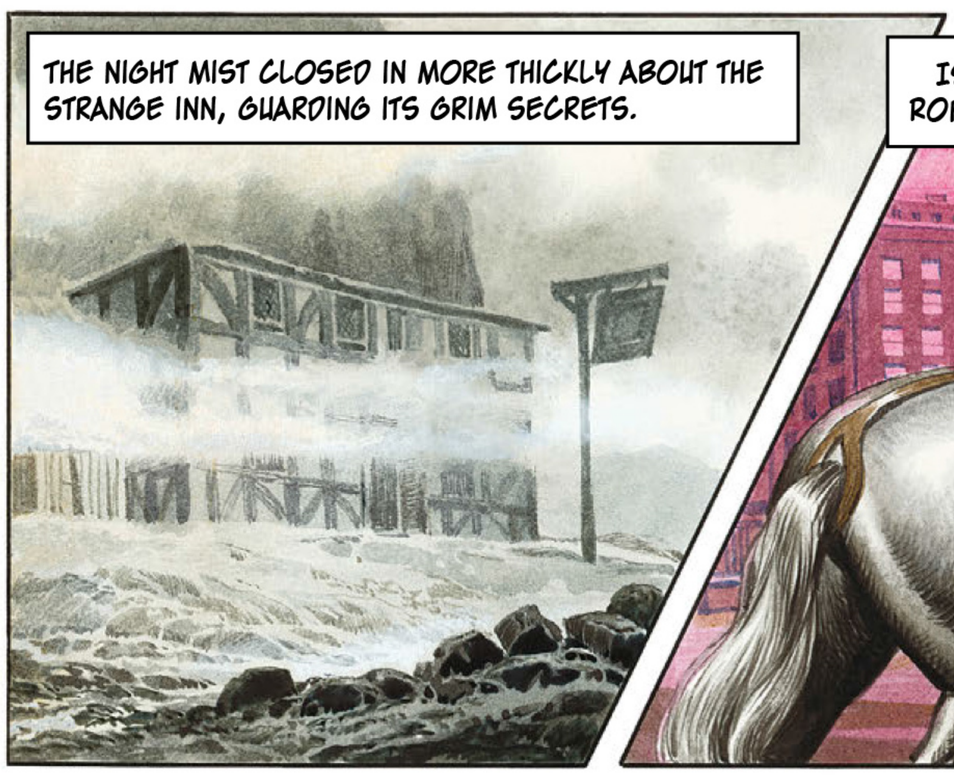
SOON, HE WAS ALONE IN THE GLOOMY BEDCHAMBER.
WHAT A PLACE TO HAVE TO SPEND THE NIGHT. I HOPE KEREN HAS FARED BETTER!

NOT QUITE ALONE!

AND WHILE ROFFA SLEPT, HIS WHOLE WORLD FELL APART!
AAAAAAAAAAAAGH!

ROFFA CARTWHEELED DOWN INTO THE ABYSS!
EEEAAAAGH!

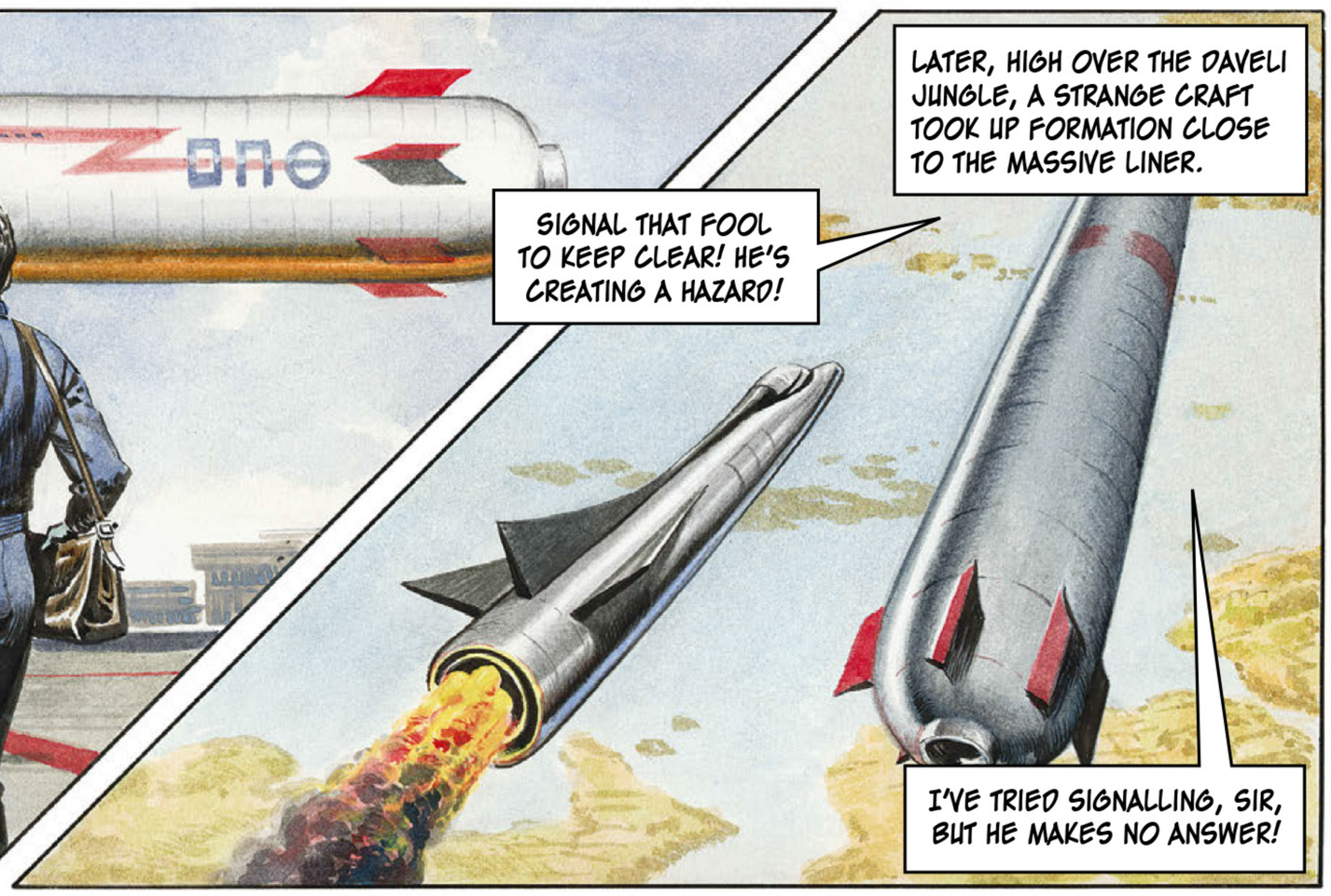

HE LANDED WITH STUNNING FORCE... AND WAS CARRIED AWAY BY A PAIR OF THE WHITE-MASKED DESPERADOES.

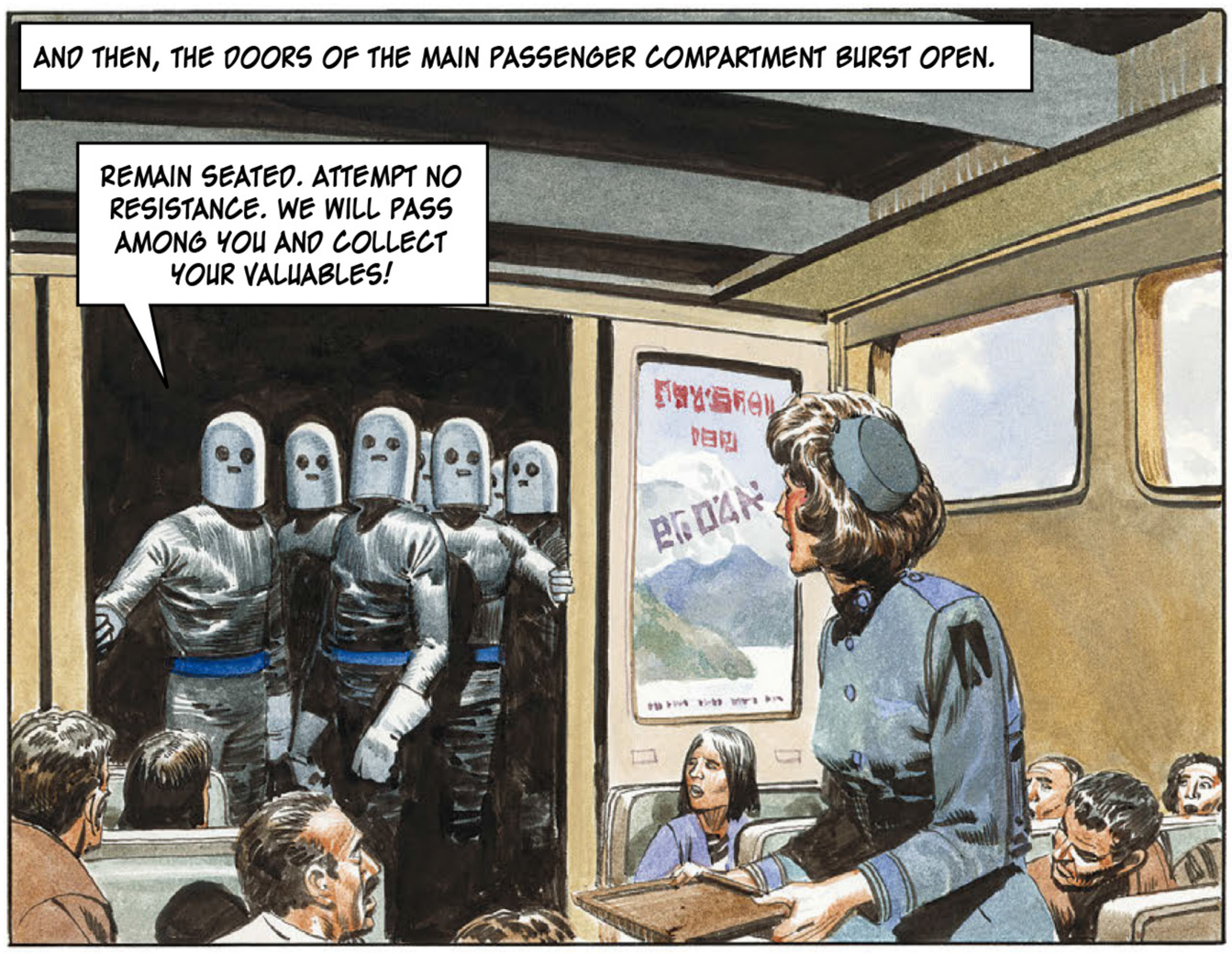

THE NIGHT MIST CLOSED IN MORE THICKLY ABOUT THE STRANGE INN, GUARDING ITS GRIM SECRETS.

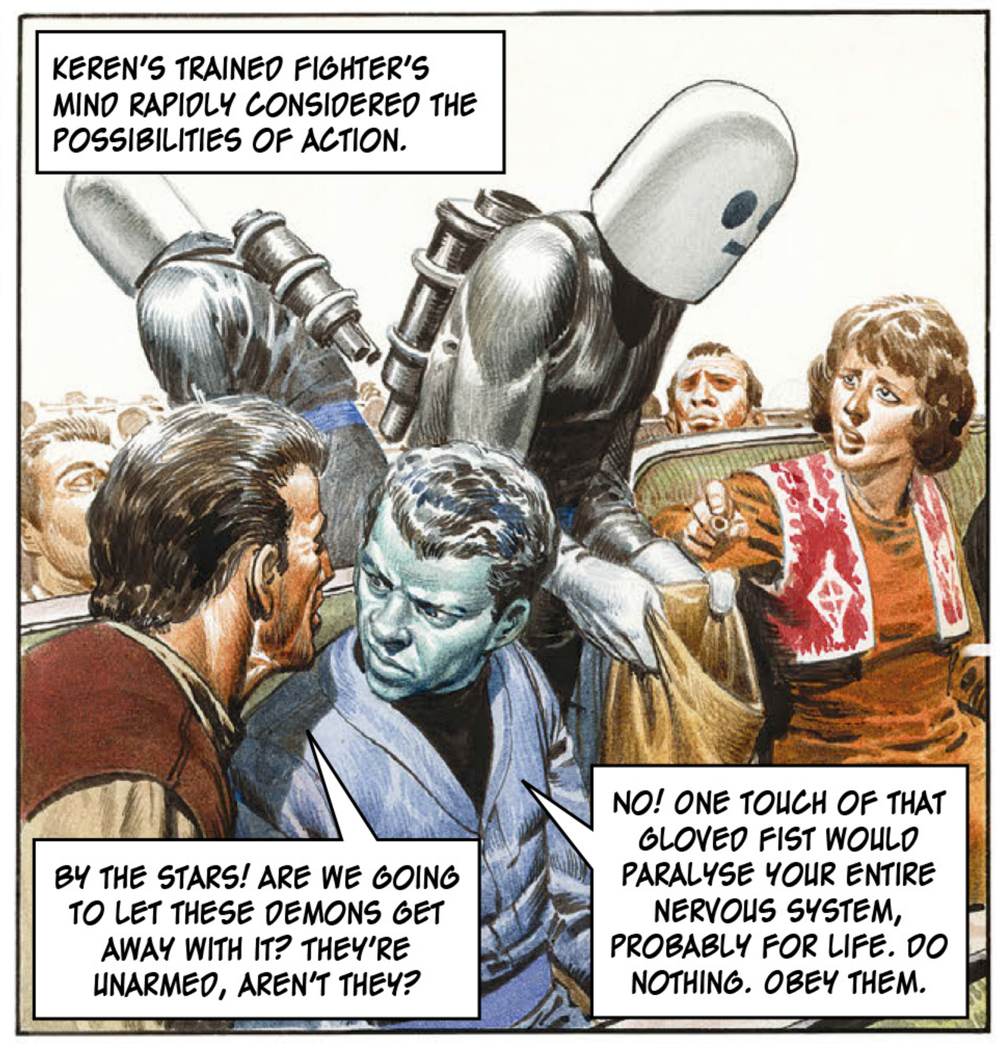
IT WAS DAWN WHEN KEREN ARRIVED BACK AT AIR FLEET HEADQUARTERS AFTER AN UNPLEASANT NIGHT IN THE CHEERLESS HILLS.
IS LIEUTENANT ROFFA BACK YET?
NO, SIR! I THOUGHT HE WAS WITH YOU?

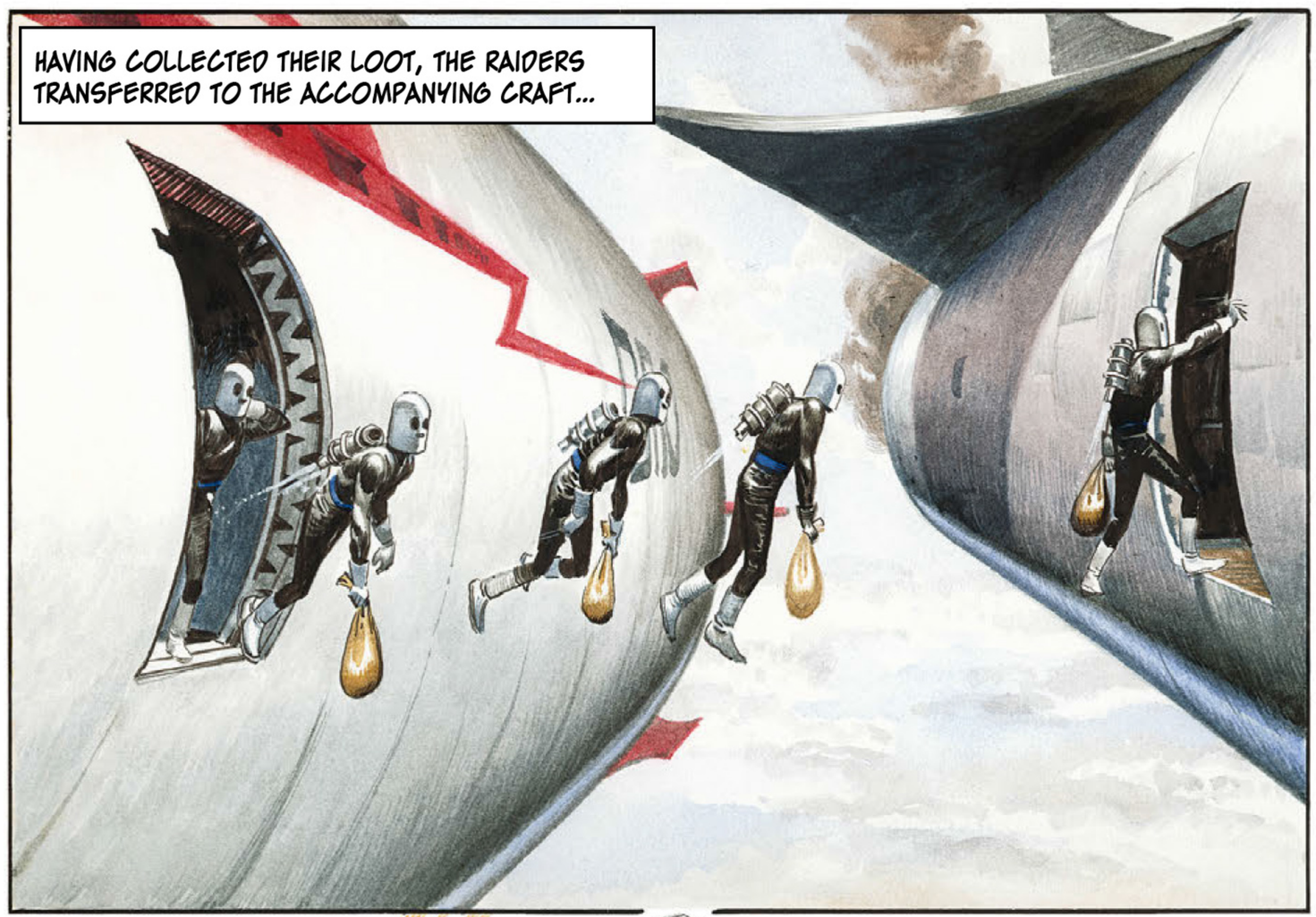
THAT EVENING...
POST LIEUTENANT ROFFA AS MISSING. DISPATCH A SEARCH PARTY TO THE HILLS. INFORM THE CIVIL POLICE AND HIS NEXT-OF-KIN...
VERY GOOD, COLONEL.

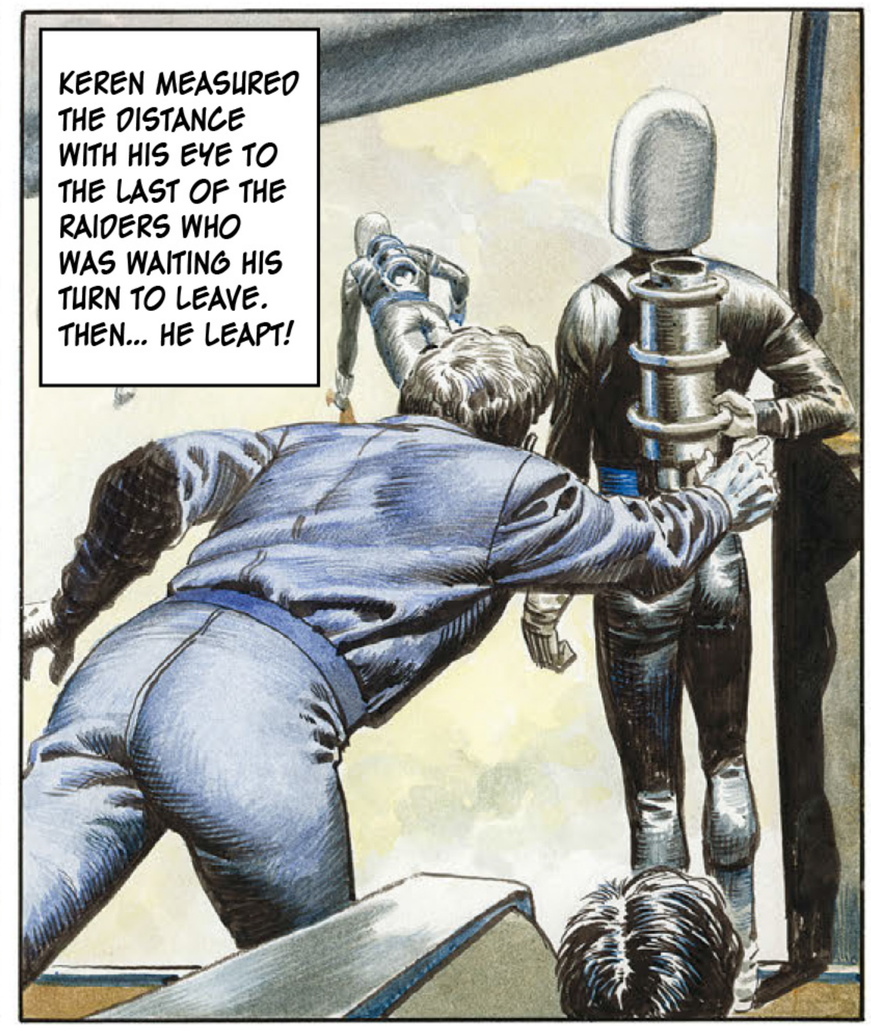
BUT IT WAS AS IF ROFFA HAD DISAPPEARED FROM THE FACE OF THE PLANET. A LUNAR MONTH PASSED WITHOUT NEWS OF HIS FRIEND AND KEREN BOARDED AN ATMOSPHERE LINER TO SPEND HIS LEAVE WITH HIS PARENTS IN DAVELI.


LATER, HIGH OVER THE DAVELI JUNGLE, A STRANGE CRAFT TOOK UP FORMATION CLOSE TO THE MASSIVE LINER.
SIGNAL THAT FOOL TO KEEP CLEAR! HE'S CREATING A HAZARD!
I'VE TRIED SIGNALLING, SIR, BUT HE MAKES NO ANSWER!


AND THEN, THE DOORS OF THE MAIN PASSENGER COMPARTMENT BURST OPEN.
REMAIN SEATED. ATTEMPT NO RESISTANCE. WE WILL PASS AMONG YOU AND COLLECT YOUR VALUABLES!

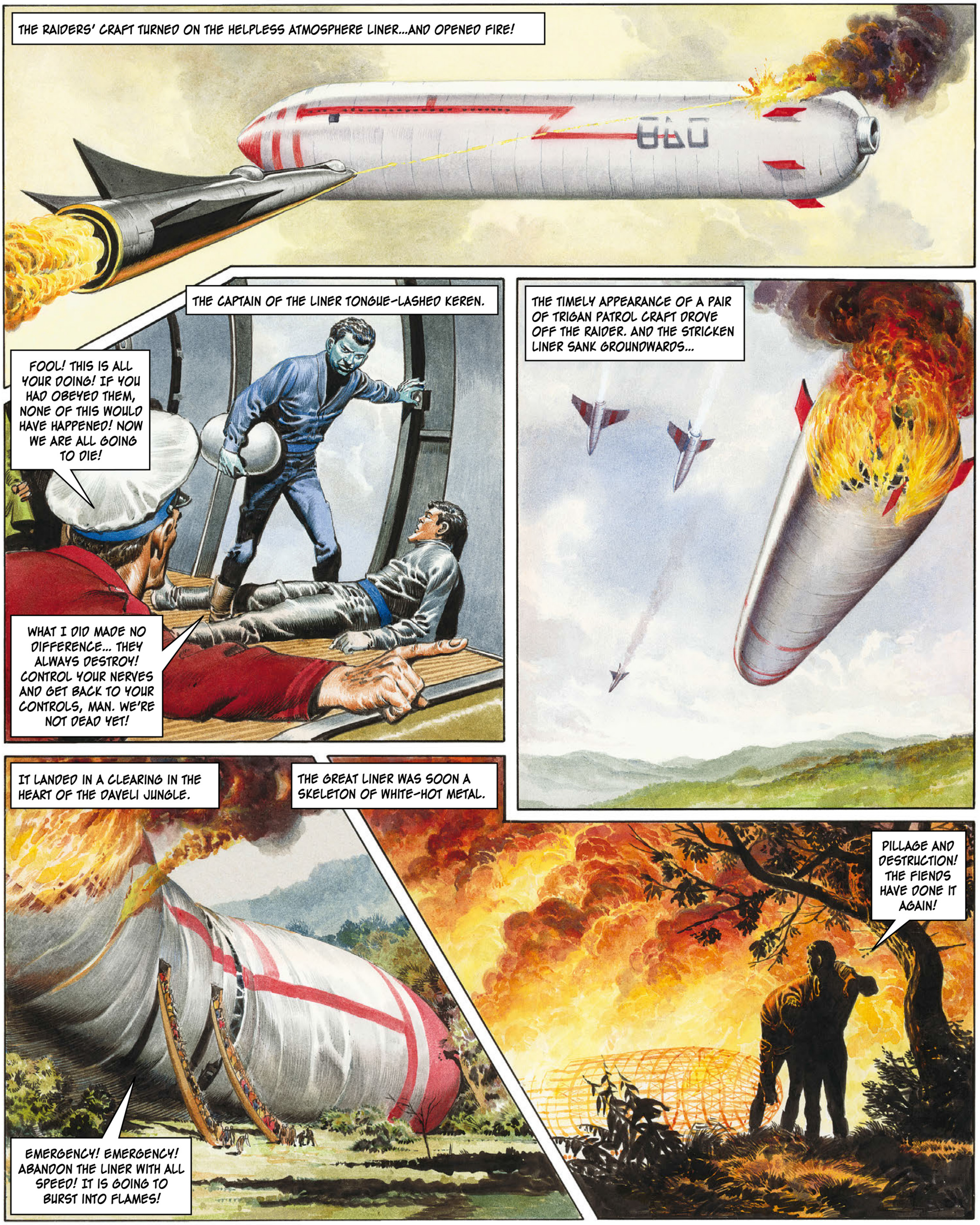

KEREN'S TRAINED FIGHTER'S MIND RAPIDLY CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITIES OF ACTION.
BY THE STARS! ARE WE GOING TO LET THESE DEMONS GET AWAY WITH IT? THEY'RE UNARMED, AREN'T THEY?
NO! ONE TOUCH OF THAT GLOVED FIST WOULD PARALYSE YOUR ENTIRE NERVOUS SYSTEM, PROBABLY FOR LIFE. DO NOTHING. OBEY THEM.

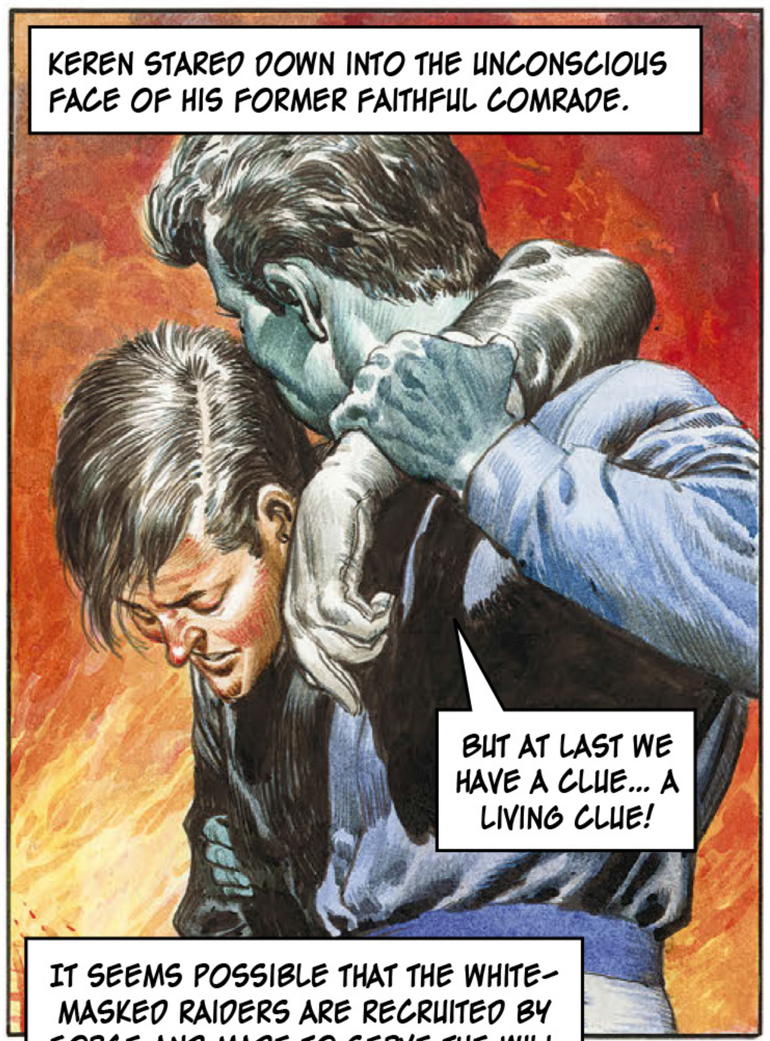

HAVING COLLECTED THEIR LOOT, THE RAIDERS TRANSFERRED TO THE ACCOMPANYING CRAFT...

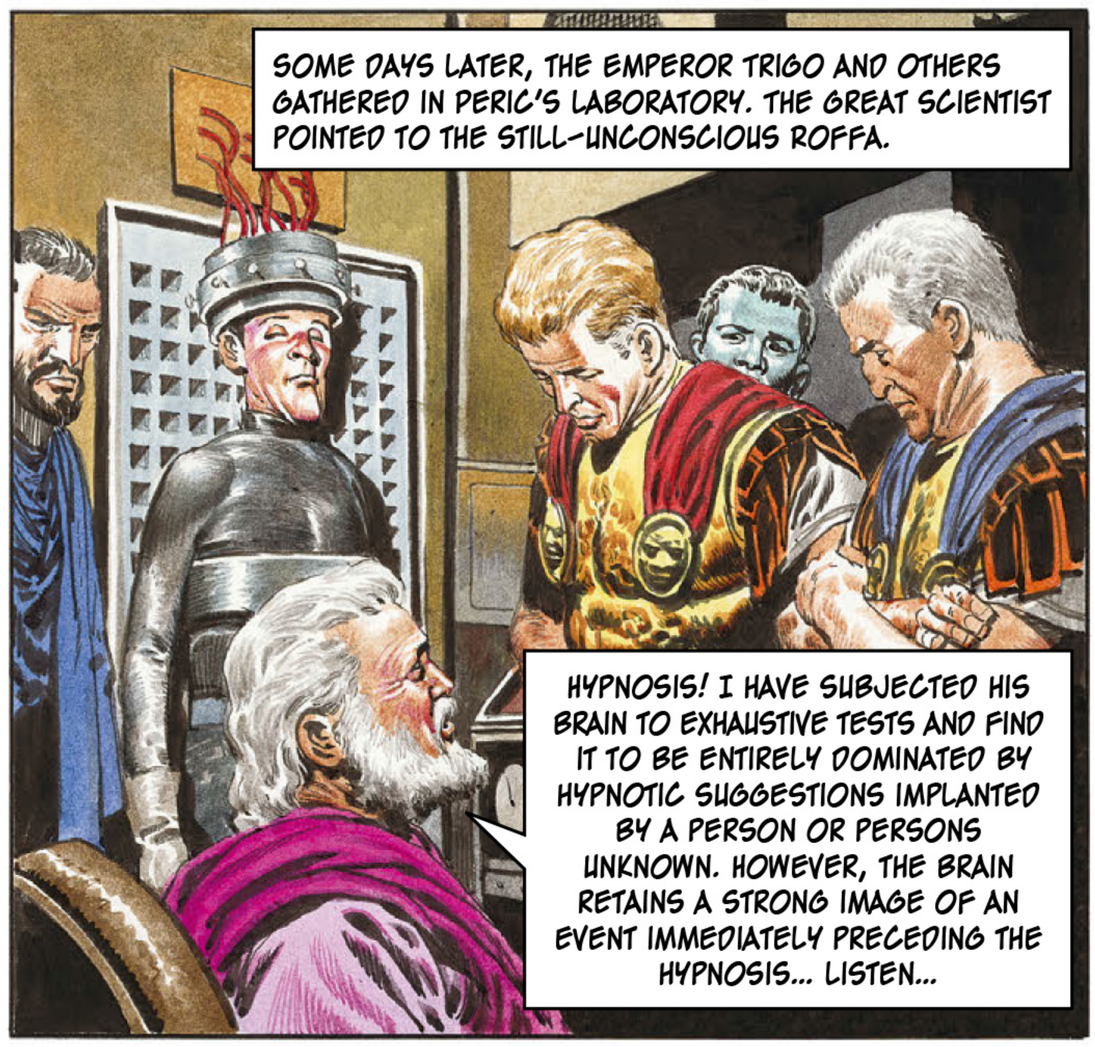

KEREN MEASURED THE DISTANCE WITH HIS EYE TO THE LAST OF THE RAIDERS WHO WAS WAITING HIS TURN TO LEAVE. THEN... HE LEAPT!

GOT YOU!
THE OTHER SAW HIM AT THE LAST SPLIT INSTANT. DUCKING A SWING OF A BLACK-GLOVED FIST, KEREN FELT HIS OWN FIST CRUNCH AGAINST SOLID BONE!

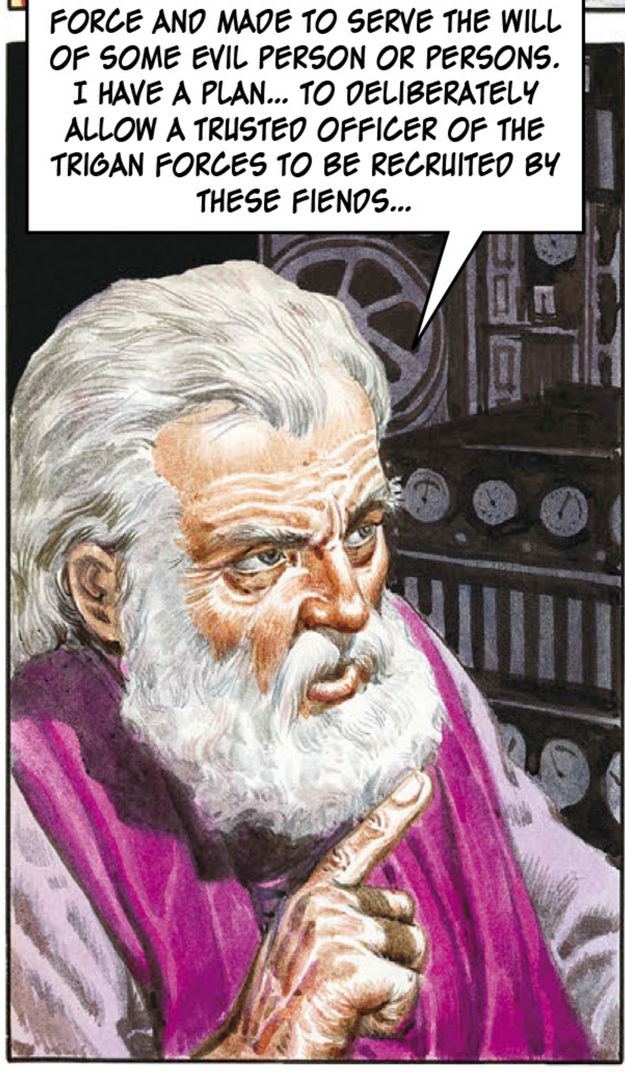
AS THE OTHER FELL IN A CRUMPLED HEAP, KEREN REACHED DOWN, SNATCHED OFF THE WHITE MASK... AND RECOILED IN SHOCK!
BY ALL THE DEMONS OF DAVELI. IT CAN'T BE! BUT IT IS... ROFFA!
HE WAS STARING INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS FACE OF HIS MISSING COMRADE!

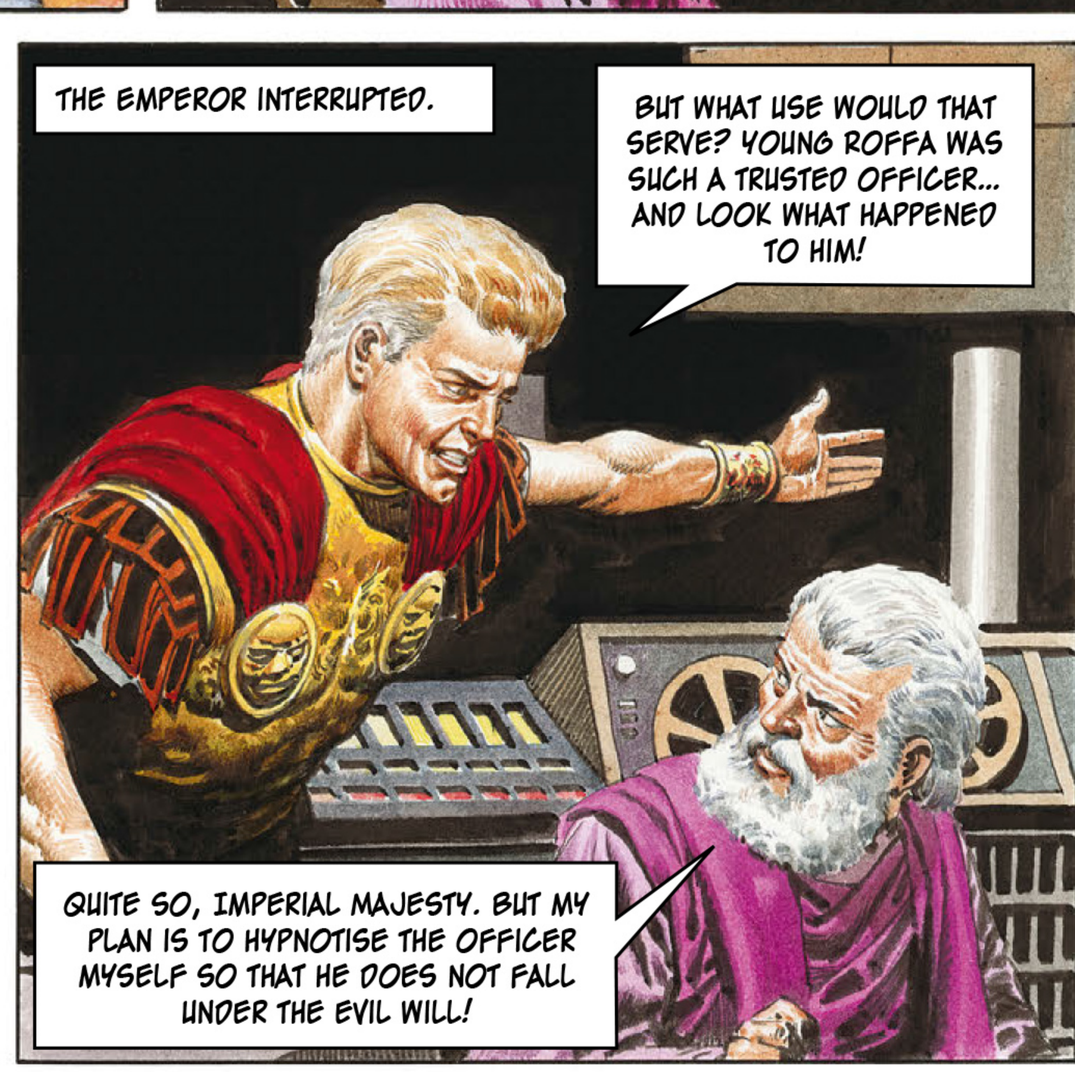

THE RAIDERS' CRAFT TURNED ON THE HELPLESS ATMOSPHERE LINER...AND OPENED FIRE!
THE CAPTAIN OF THE LINER TONGUE-LASHED KEREN.
FOOL! THIS IS ALL YOUR DOING! IF YOU HAD OBEYED THEM, NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED! NOW WE ARE ALL GOING TO DIE!
WHAT I DID MADE NO DIFFERENCE... THEY ALWAYS DESTROY! CONTROL YOUR NERVES AND GET BACK TO YOUR CONTROLS, MAN. WE'RE NOT DEAD YET!
THE TIMELY APPEARANCE OF A PAIR OF TRIGAN PATROL CRAFT DROVE OFF THE RAIDER. AND THE STRICKEN LINER SANK GROUNDWARDS...
IT LANDED IN A CLEARING IN THE HEART OF THE DAVELI JUNGLE.
THE GREAT LINER WAS SOON A SKELETON OF WHITE-HOT METAL.
EMERGENCY! EMERGENCY! ABANDON THE LINER WITH ALL SPEED! IT IS GOING TO BURST INTO FLAMES!
PILLAGE AND DESTRUCTION! THE FIENDS HAVE DONE IT AGAIN!


KEREN STARED DOWN INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS FACE OF HIS FORMER FAITHFUL COMRADE.
BUT AT LAST WE HAVE A CLUE... A LIVING CLUE!


SOME DAYS LATER, THE EMPEROR TRIGO AND OTHERS GATHERED IN PERIC'S LABORATORY. THE GREAT SCIENTIST POINTED TO THE STILL-UNCONSCIOUS ROFFA.
HYPNOSIS! I HAVE SUBJECTED HIS BRAIN TO EXHAUSTIVE TESTS AND FIND IT TO BE ENTIRELY DOMINATED BY HYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS IMPLANTED BY A PERSON OR PERSONS UNKNOWN. HOWEVER, THE BRAIN RETAINS A STRONG IMAGE OF AN EVENT IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE HYPNOSIS... LISTEN...

LOST... LOST IN THE MIST... THE LONELY INN IN THE HILLS...

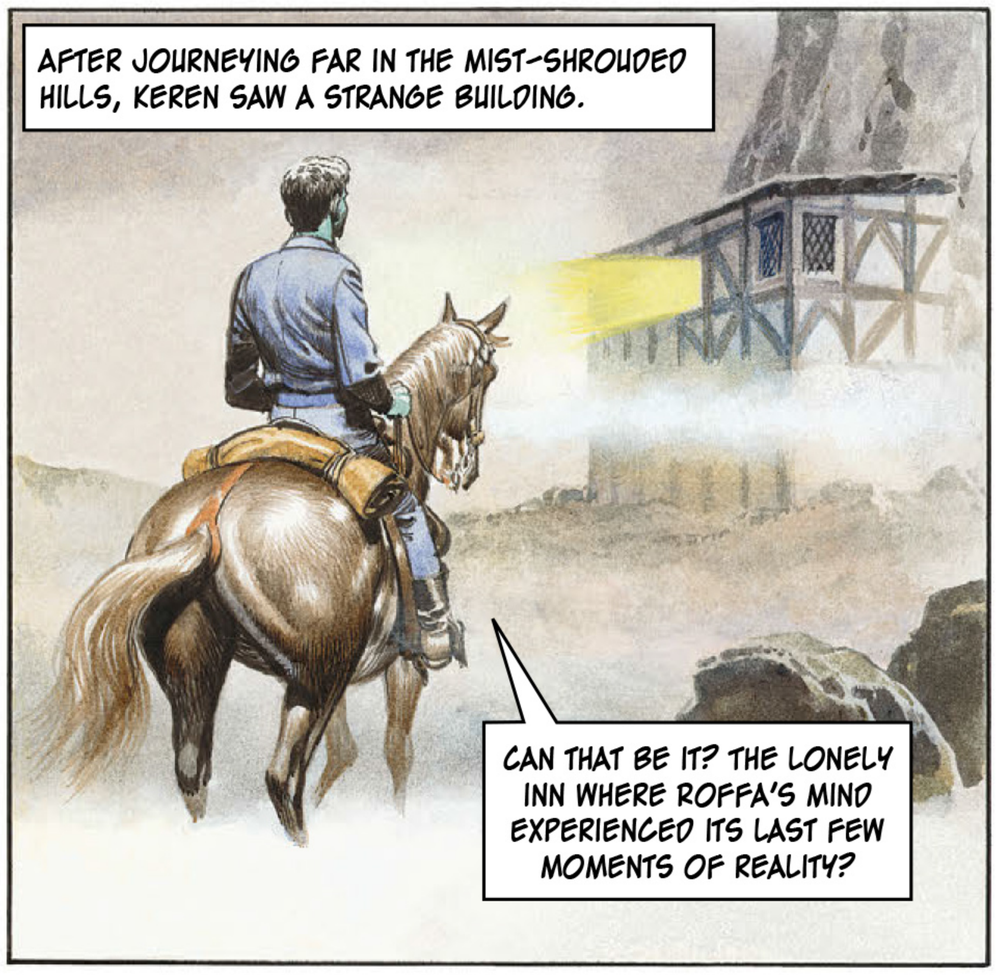

IT SEEMS POSSIBLE THAT THE WHITE-MASKED RAIDERS ARE RECRUITED BY FORCE AND MADE TO SERVE THE WILL OF SOME EVIL PERSON OR PERSONS. I HAVE A PLAN... TO DELIBERATELY ALLOW A TRUSTED OFFICER OF THE TRIGAN FORCES TO BE RECRUITED BY THESE FIENDS...


THE EMPEROR INTERRUPTED.
BUT WHAT USE WOULD THAT SERVE? YOUNG ROFFA WAS SUCH A TRUSTED OFFICER... AND LOOK WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM!
QUITE SO, IMPERIAL MAJESTY. BUT MY PLAN IS TO HYPNOTISE THE OFFICER MYSELF SO THAT HE DOES NOT FALL UNDER THE EVIL WILL!

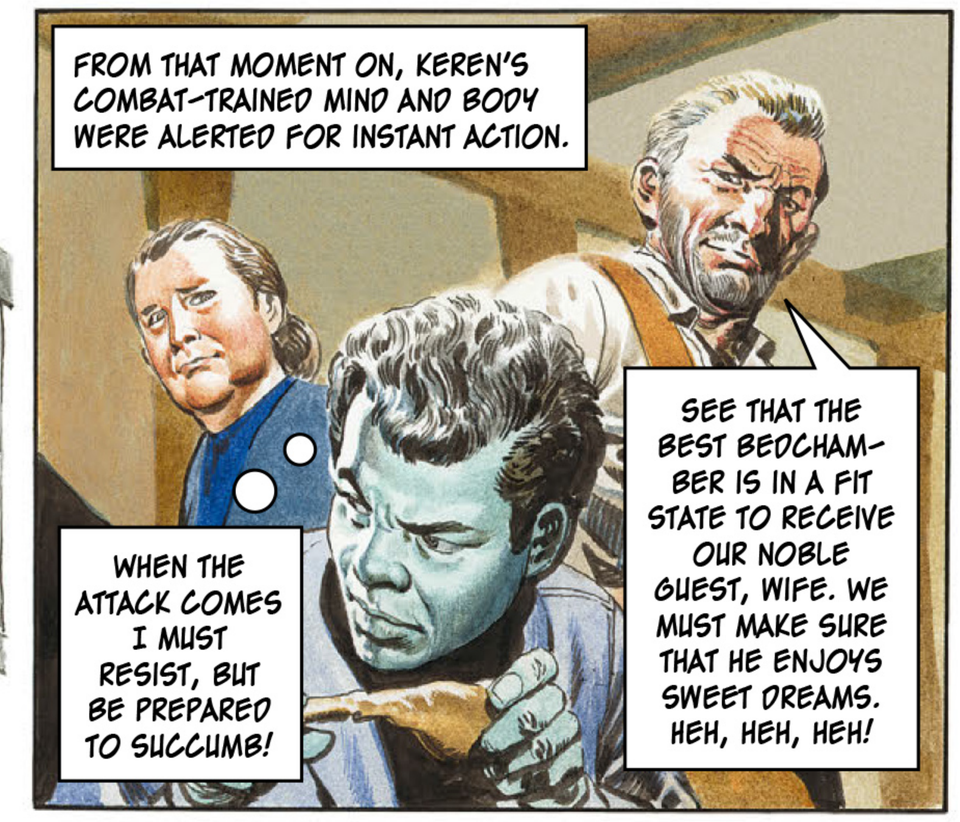
KEREN LEAPT TO HIS FEET.
I'LL GO!

SO IT WAS THAT KEREN'S MIND WAS SUBJECTED TO CERTAIN HYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS FROM PERIC.
YOU WILL DISREGARD ALL OTHER SUGGESTIONS AND REMAIN TRUE TO YOUR TASK, WHICH IS TO LEARN ALL THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT THE WHITE-MASKED RAIDERS AND WHOEVER CONTROLS THEM. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
I... UNDERSTAND.

LATE ONE EVENING, KEREN RODE UP TO THE HILLS AND LOOKED ABOUT HIM IN THE GATHERING MIST.
NOW TO FIND THE LONELY INN...


AFTER JOURNEYING FAR IN THE MIST-SHROUDED HILLS, KEREN SAW A STRANGE BUILDING.
CAN THAT BE IT? THE LONELY INN WHERE ROFFA'S MIND EXPERIENCED ITS LAST FEW MOMENTS OF REALITY?

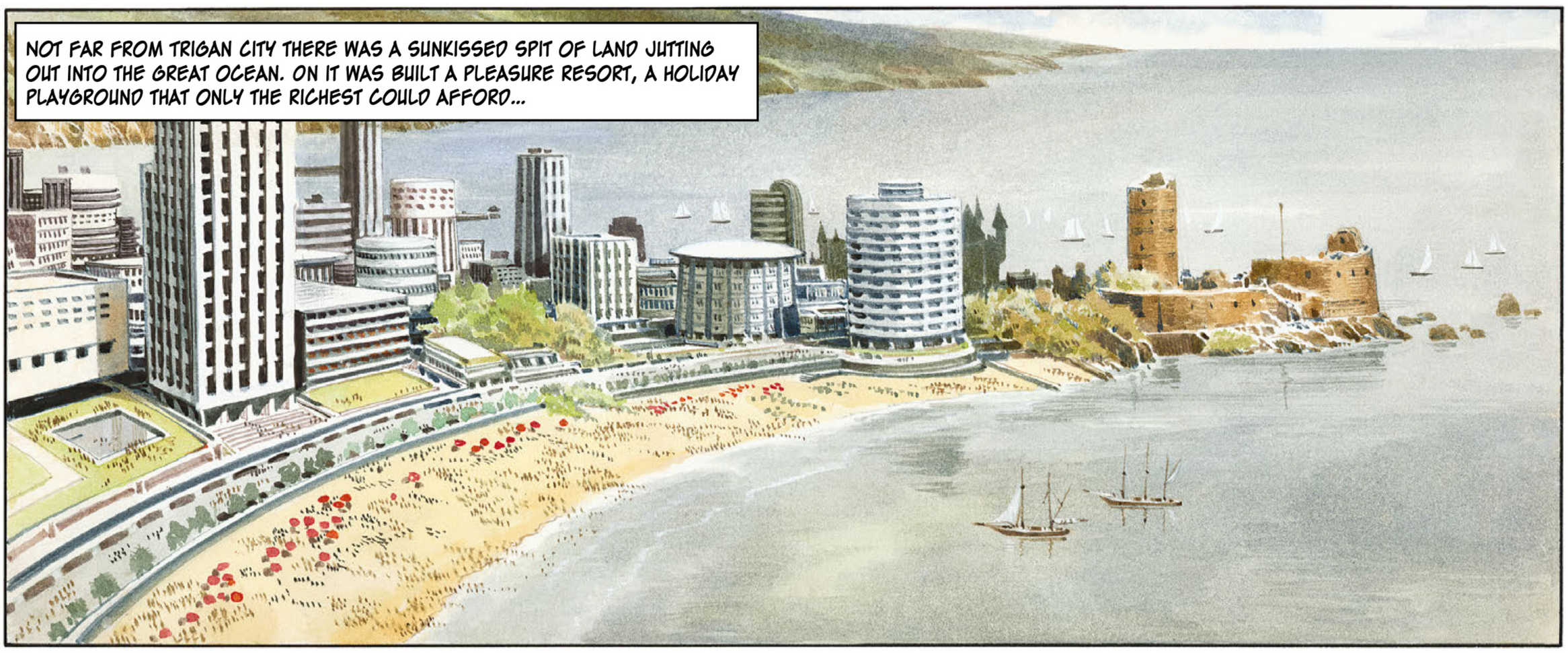
HIS KNOCK WAS ANSWERED.
FOOD AND A BED FOR THE NIGHT, YOUNG MASTER? IT WILL BE A PLEASURE. HEH, HEH!

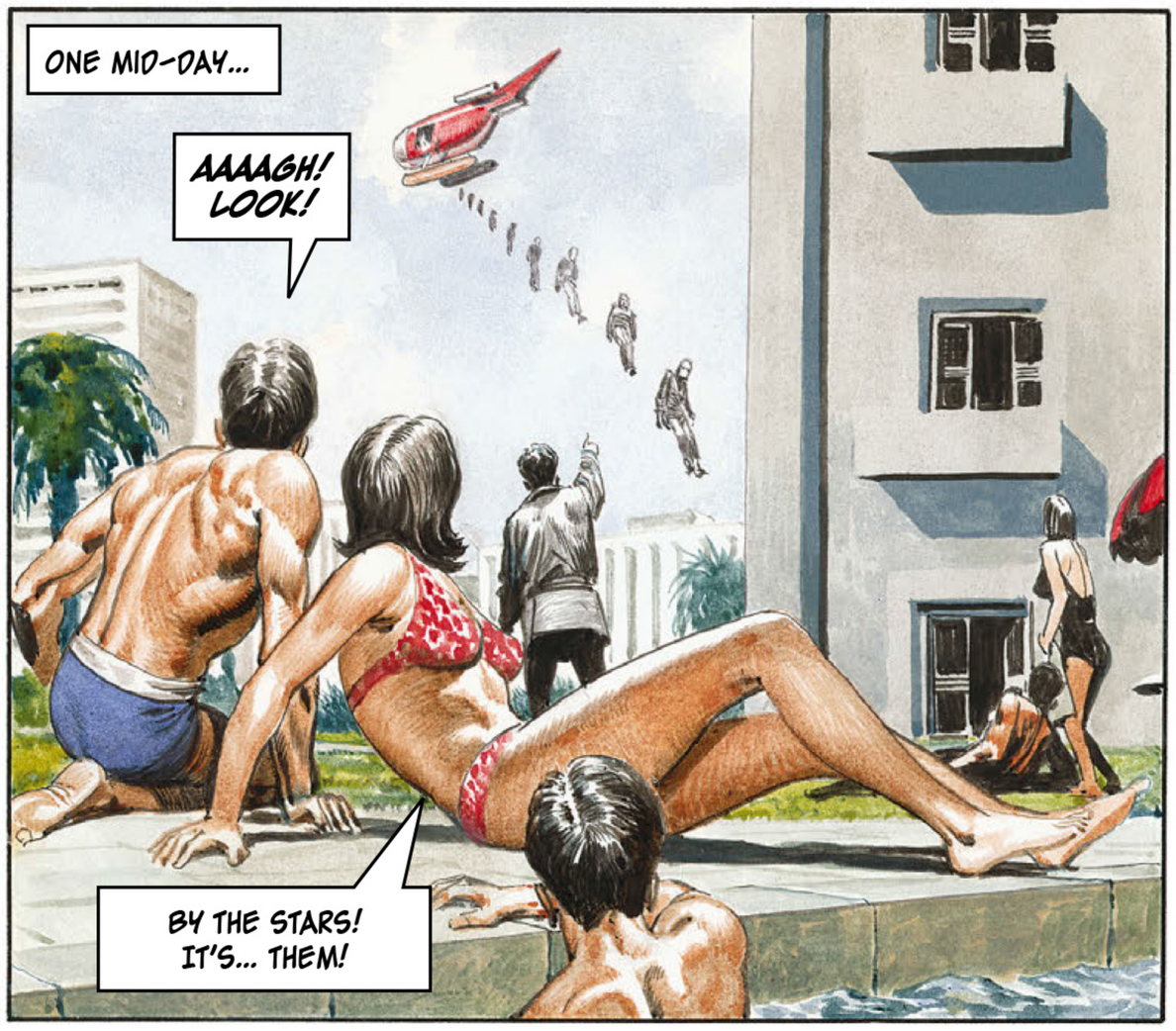

FROM THAT MOMENT ON, KEREN'S COMBAT-TRAINED MIND AND BODY WERE ALERTED FOR INSTANT ACTION.
WHEN THE ATTACK COMES I MUST RESIST, BUT BE PREPARED TO SUCCUMB!
SEE THAT THE BEST BEDCHAMBER IS IN A FIT STATE TO RECEIVE OUR NOBLE GUEST, WIFE. WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT HE ENJOYS SWEET DREAMS. HEH, HEH, HEH!

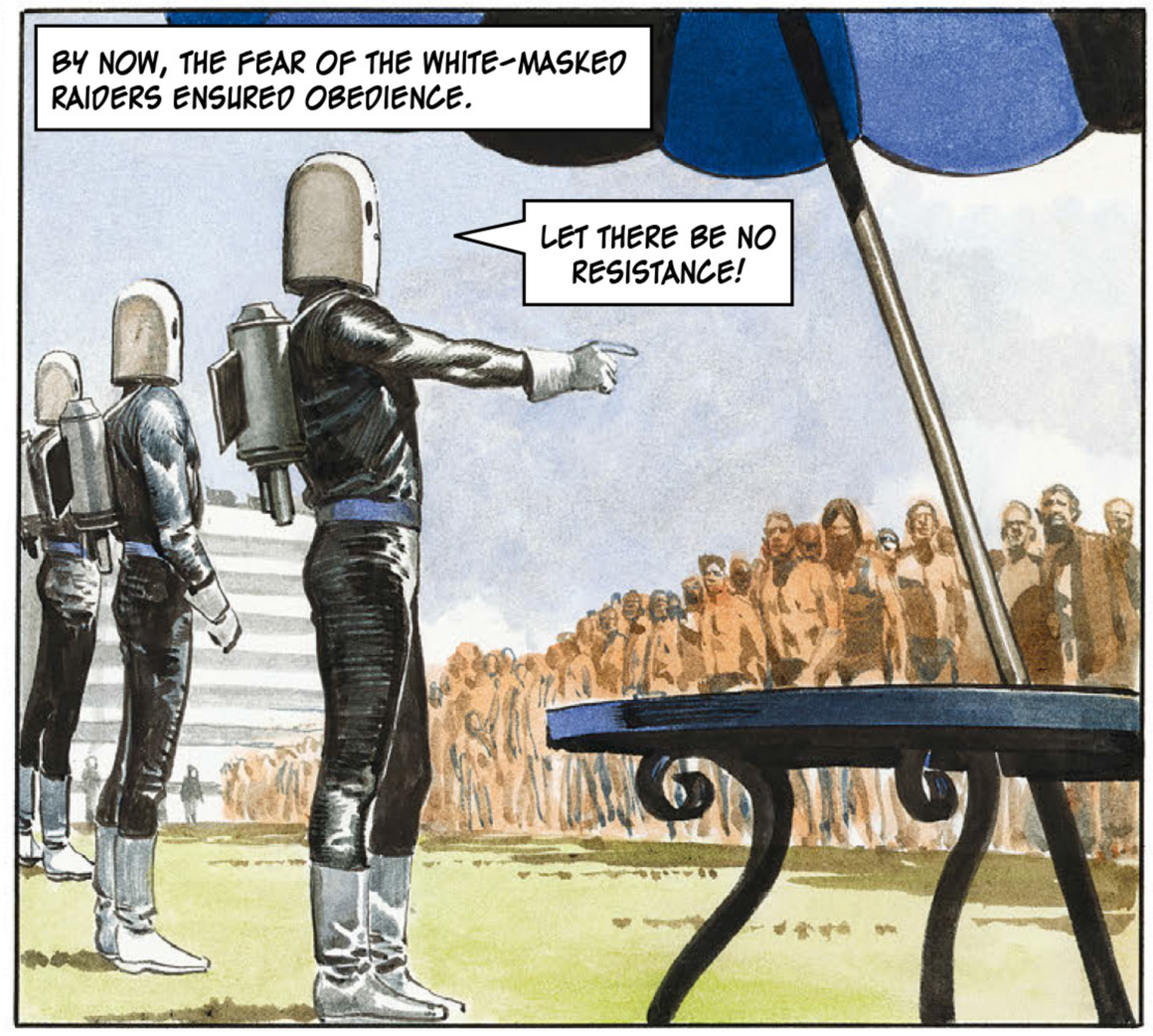
LATER, IN THE GLOOMY BEDCHAMBER, HE WAITED WITH EVERY NERVE SCREWED TO SCREAMING PITCH.
WHERE... AND WHEN?

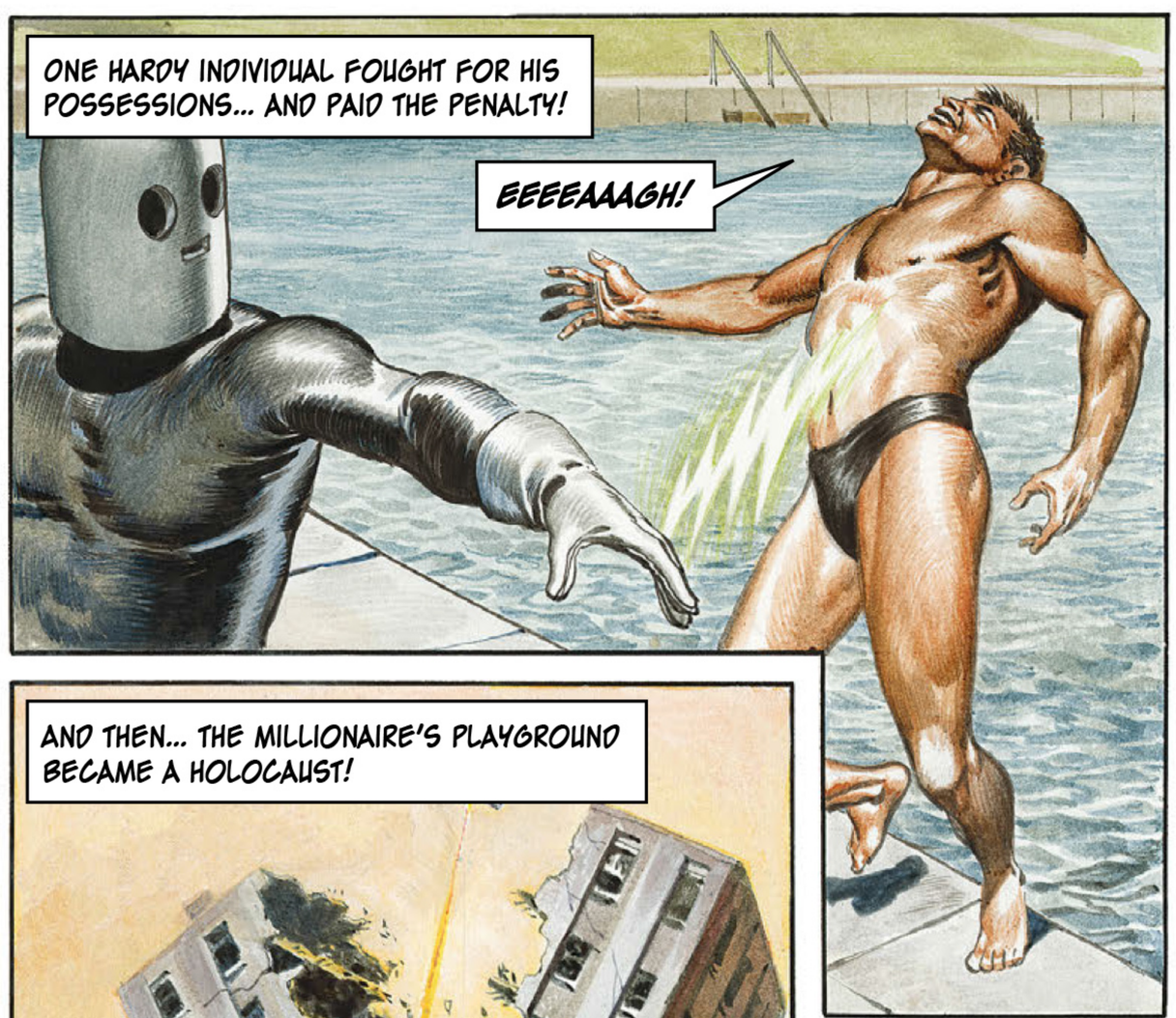
HE DID NOT HAVE LONG TO WAIT!
EEEEEEEAAAGH!

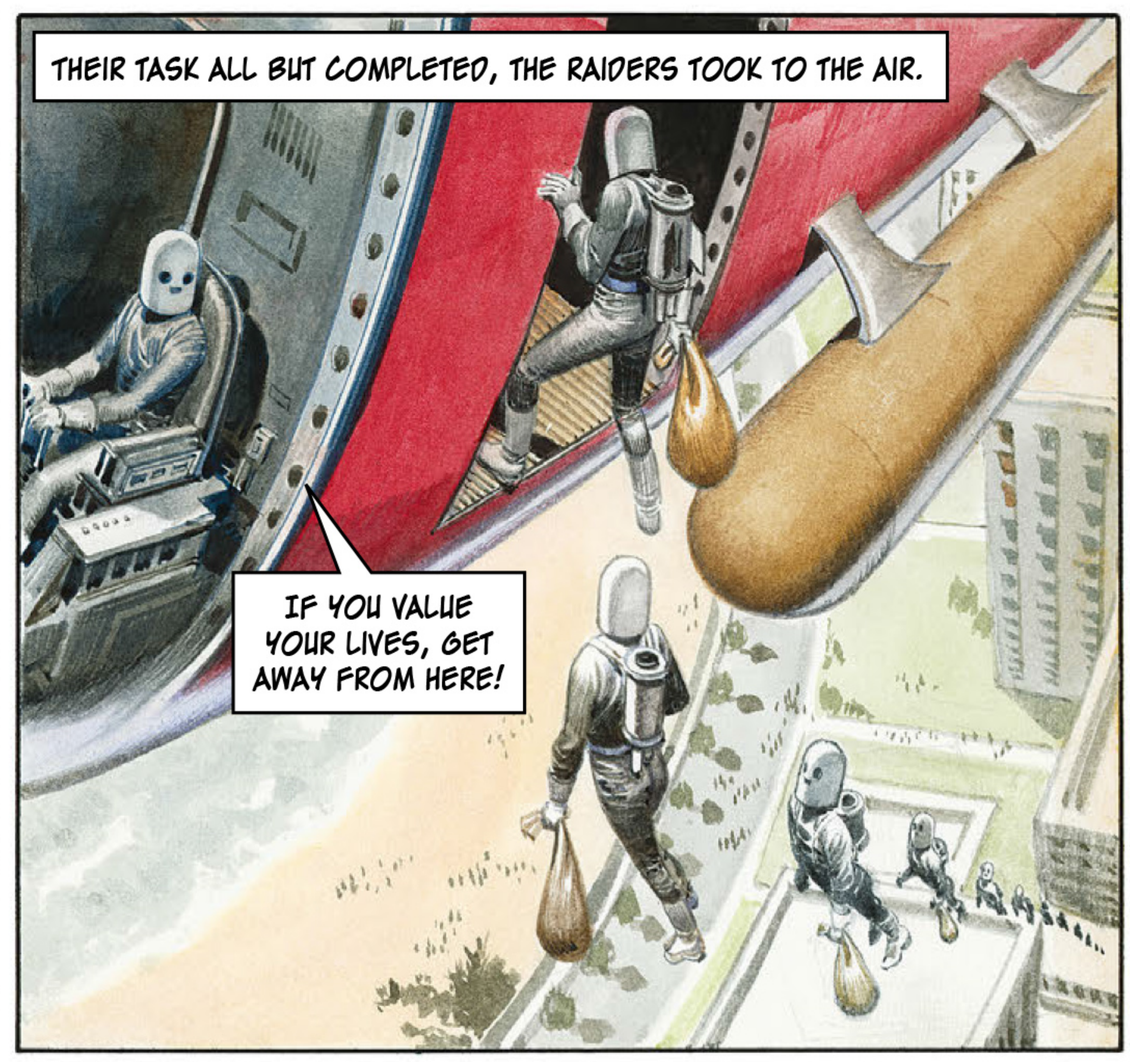
THREE LUNAR DAYS AND NIGHTS PASSED. A CONFERENCE WAS HELD IN TRIGO'S STUDY AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE.
KEREN HAS NOT RETURNED! I THINK WE MAY SAFELY ASSUME THAT PART ONE OF THE PLAN HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED!
WE MUST NOW WAIT WITH PATIENCE FOR PART TWO!

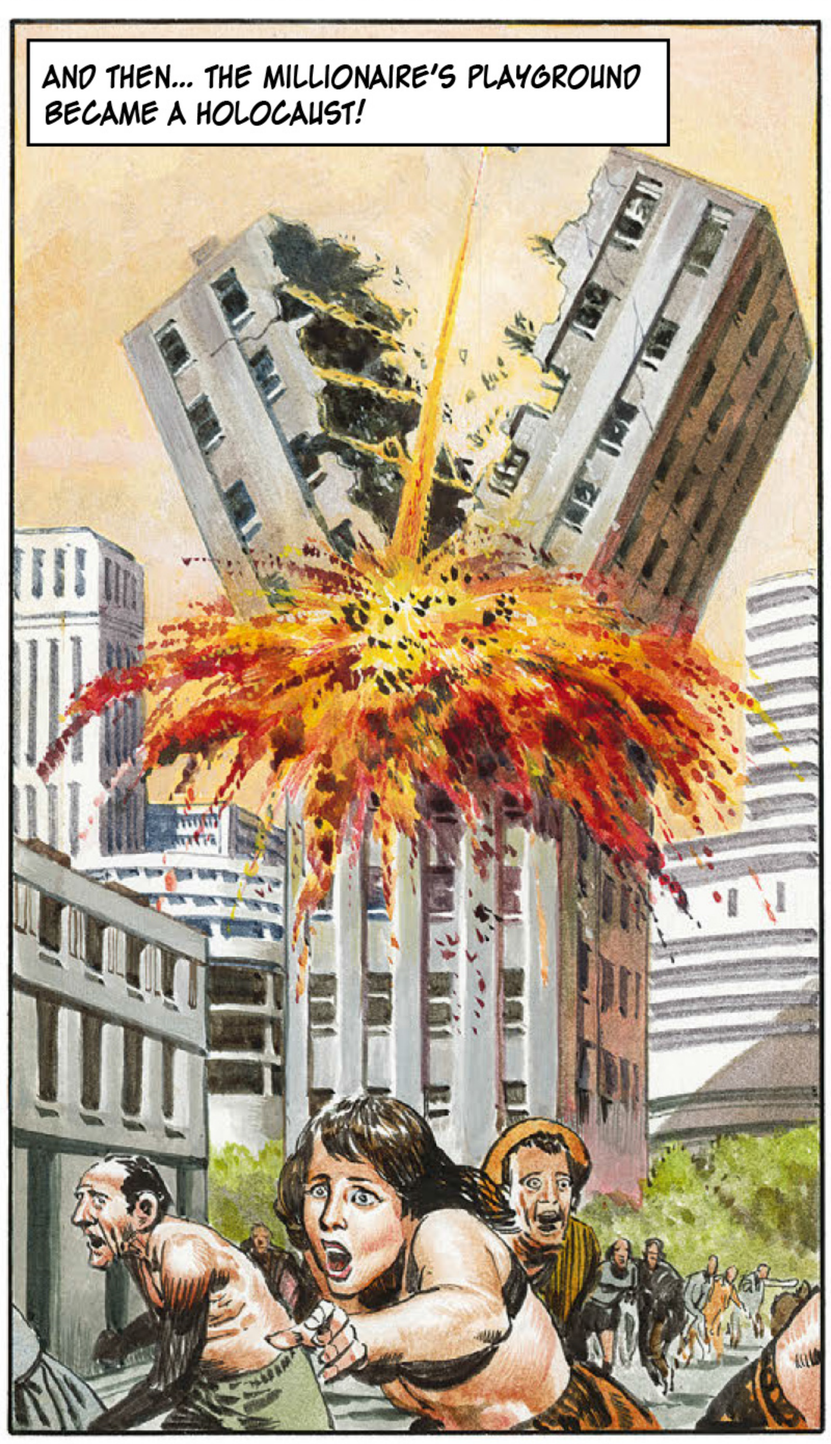

NOT FAR FROM TRIGAN CITY THERE WAS A SUNKISSED SPIT OF LAND JUTTING OUT INTO THE GREAT OCEAN. ON IT WAS BUILT A PLEASURE RESORT, A HOLIDAY PLAYGROUND THAT ONLY THE RICHEST COULD AFFORD...


ONE MID-DAY...
AAAAGH! LOOK!
BY THE STARS! IT'S... THEM!


BY NOW, THE FEAR OF THE WHITE-MASKED RAIDERS ENSURED OBEDIENCE.
LET THERE BE NO RESISTANCE!


ONE HARDY INDIVIDUAL FOUGHT FOR HIS POSSESSIONS... AND PAID THE PENALTY!
EEEEAAAGH!

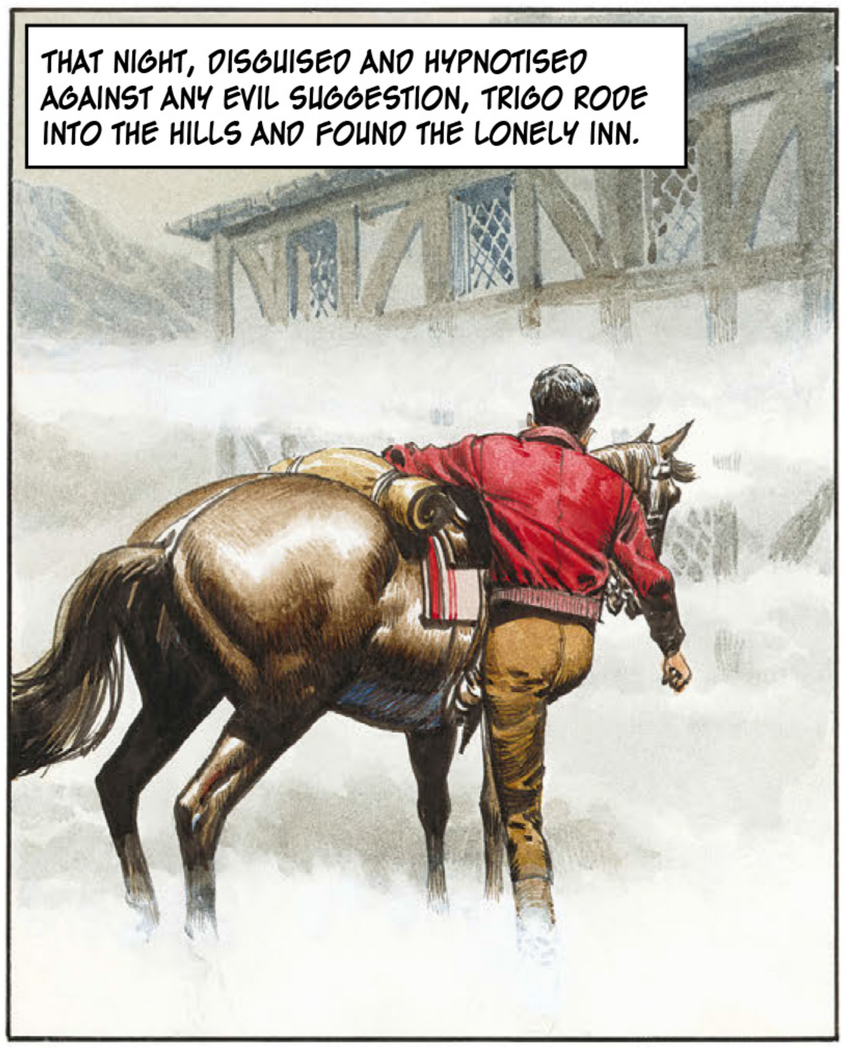

THEIR TASK ALL BUT COMPLETED, THE RAIDERS TOOK TO THE AIR.
IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIVES, GET AWAY FROM HERE!


AND THEN... THE MILLIONAIRE'S PLAYGROUND BECAME A HOLOCAUST!

LATER -MUCH LATER- OFFICERS OF A SPECIAL POLICE FORCE UNIT RECOVERED THE VICTIM FROM THE SWIMMING POOL.
SOMETHING CLUTCHED IN HIS HAND... A MESSAGE!

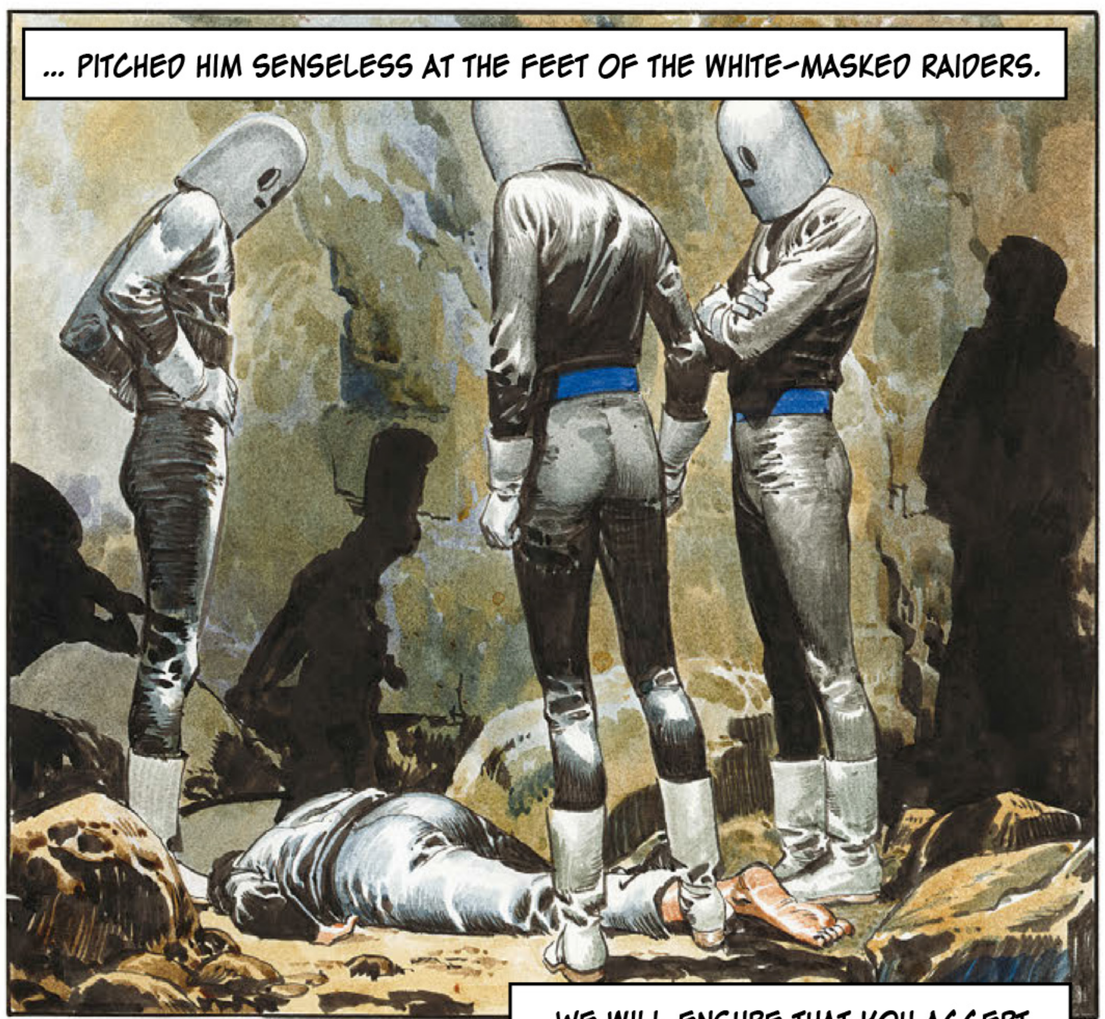
IT'S A MESSAGE... FROM KEREN!

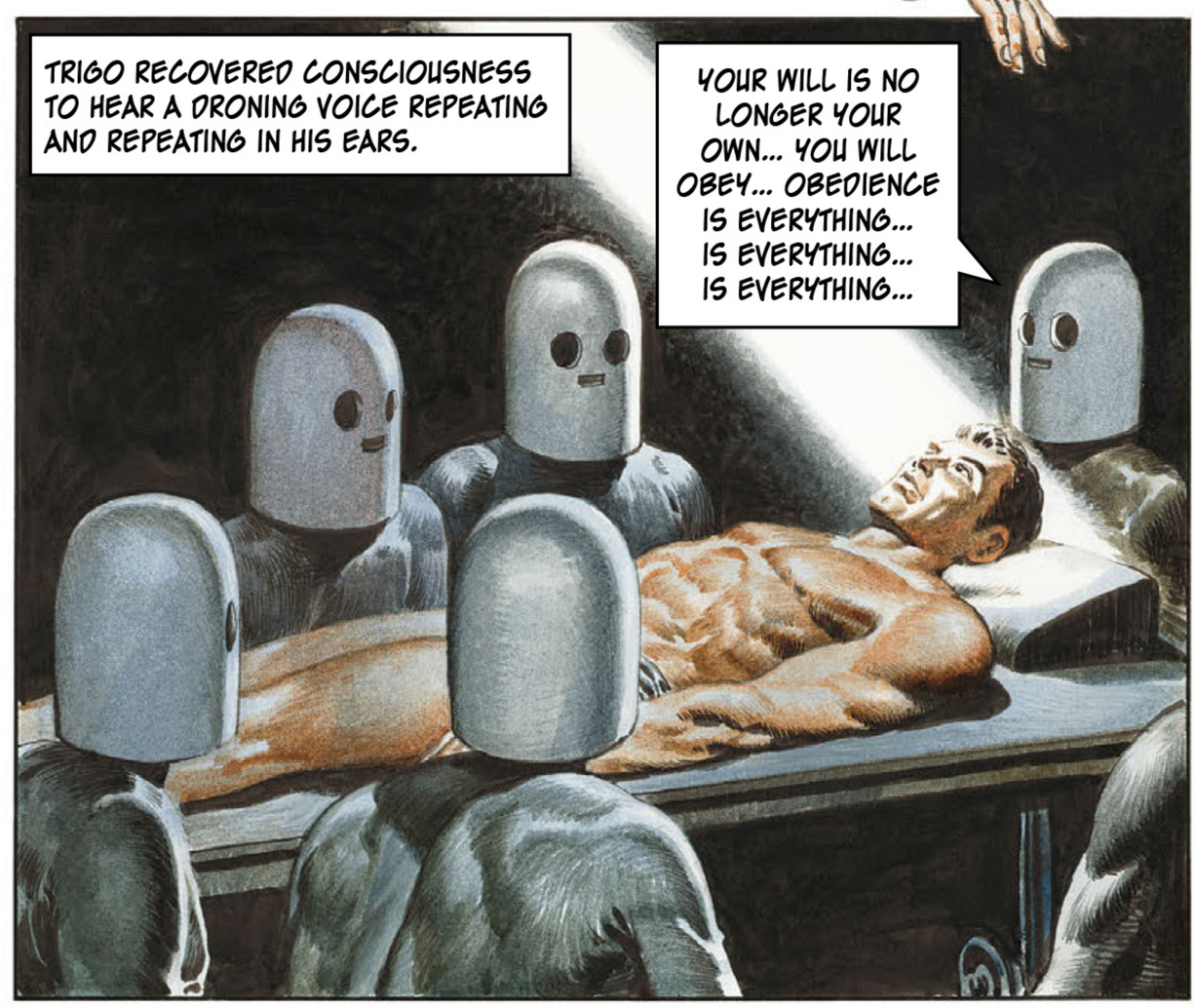
THE SCENE OF THE FOURTH OUTRAGE PERPETUATED BY THOSE WHITE-MASKED FIENDS – THE TRIGAN CITY HOLIDAY PLAYGROUND...
NOT CONTENT WITH MAKING OFF WITH OVER FIFTY MILLION IN LOOT, THE RAIDERS WILFULLY AND WANTONLY BLASTED THE SITE TO RUBBLE!
PERIC IS ADDRESSING THE EMPEROR AND HIS CHIEFS-OF-STAFF...
HOWEVER, STAGE TWO OF OUR PLAN HAS SUCCEEDED. AT SOME TIME DURING THE ATTACK, KEREN –WHO TOOK PART IN IT– WAS ABLE TO PLANT A MESSAGE FOR US...
IT SAYS... "I HAVE LEARNED MUCH ABOUT THE ORGANISATION BUT URGENTLY NEED ASSISTANCE. SEND ANOTHER AGENT WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO CONTACT ME. I AM KNOWN HERE AS OPERATOR NUMBER THIRTEEN."
TRIGO'S VOICE RANG OUT THROUGH THE CHAMBER.
I'LL GO!
IMPERIAL MAJESTY!
THE EMPEROR WOULD NOT BE DISSUADED.
ANY OFFICER IN THE IMPERIAL SERVICE WILL BE WILLING...
LET ME GO, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!
MY MIND IS MADE UP! THESE FIENDS ARE THREATENING THE PEACE AND SECURITY OF MY EMPIRE. IT IS I WHO MUST DEAL WITH THEM!
MMMMM... I SEE YOU AS DARKER, SWARTHIER...
AND SO, THE IMPERIAL FEATURES –FAMILIAR FROM EVERY COIN IN THE EMPIRE– WERE RADICALLY DISGUISED...
AND THE FINISHING TOUCH... CONTACT LENSES TO CHANGE THE COLOUR OF YOUR EYES TO BROWN.

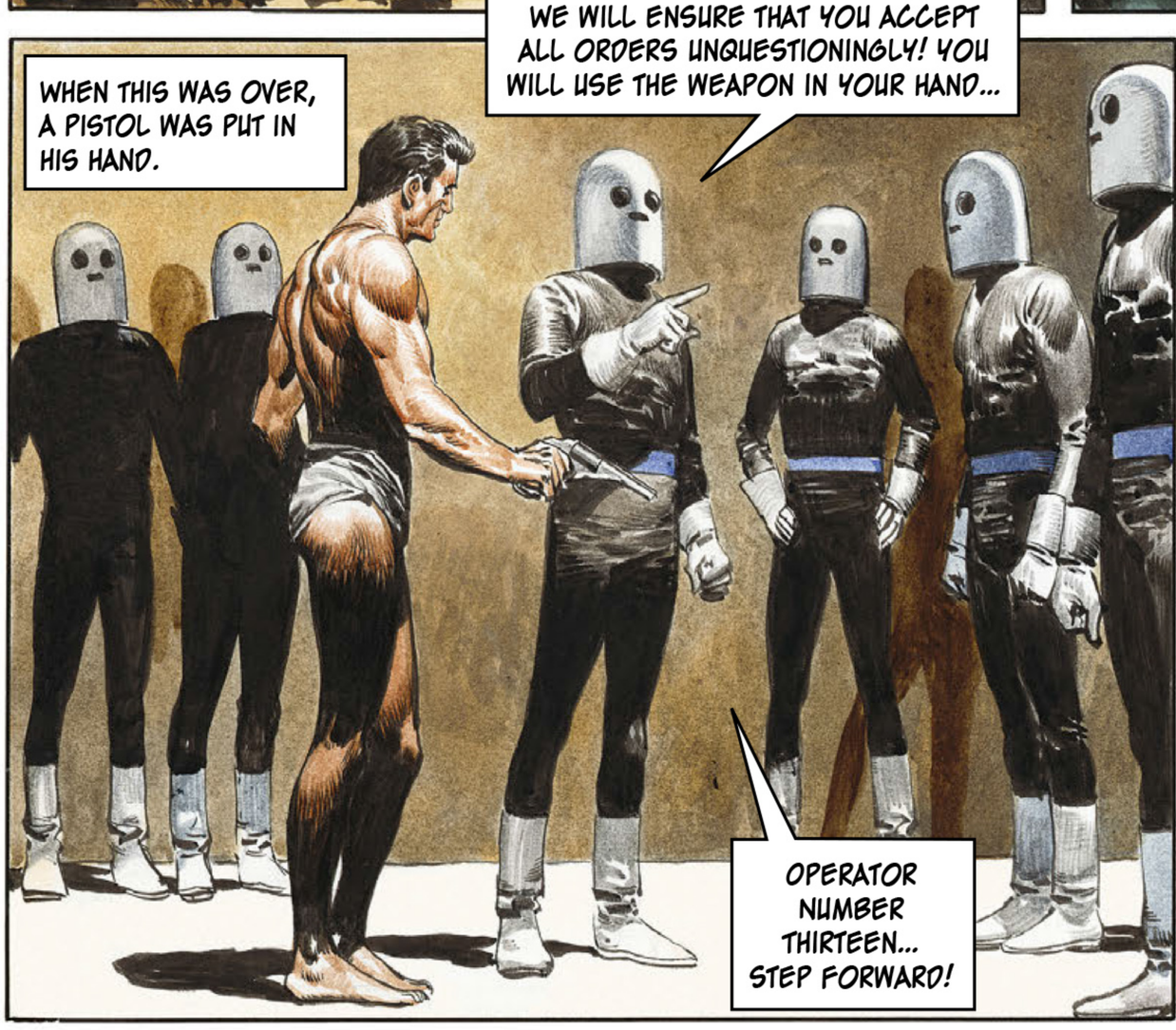

THAT NIGHT, DISGUISED AND HYPNOTISED AGAINST ANY EVIL SUGGESTION, TRIGO RODE INTO THE HILLS AND FOUND THE LONELY INN.

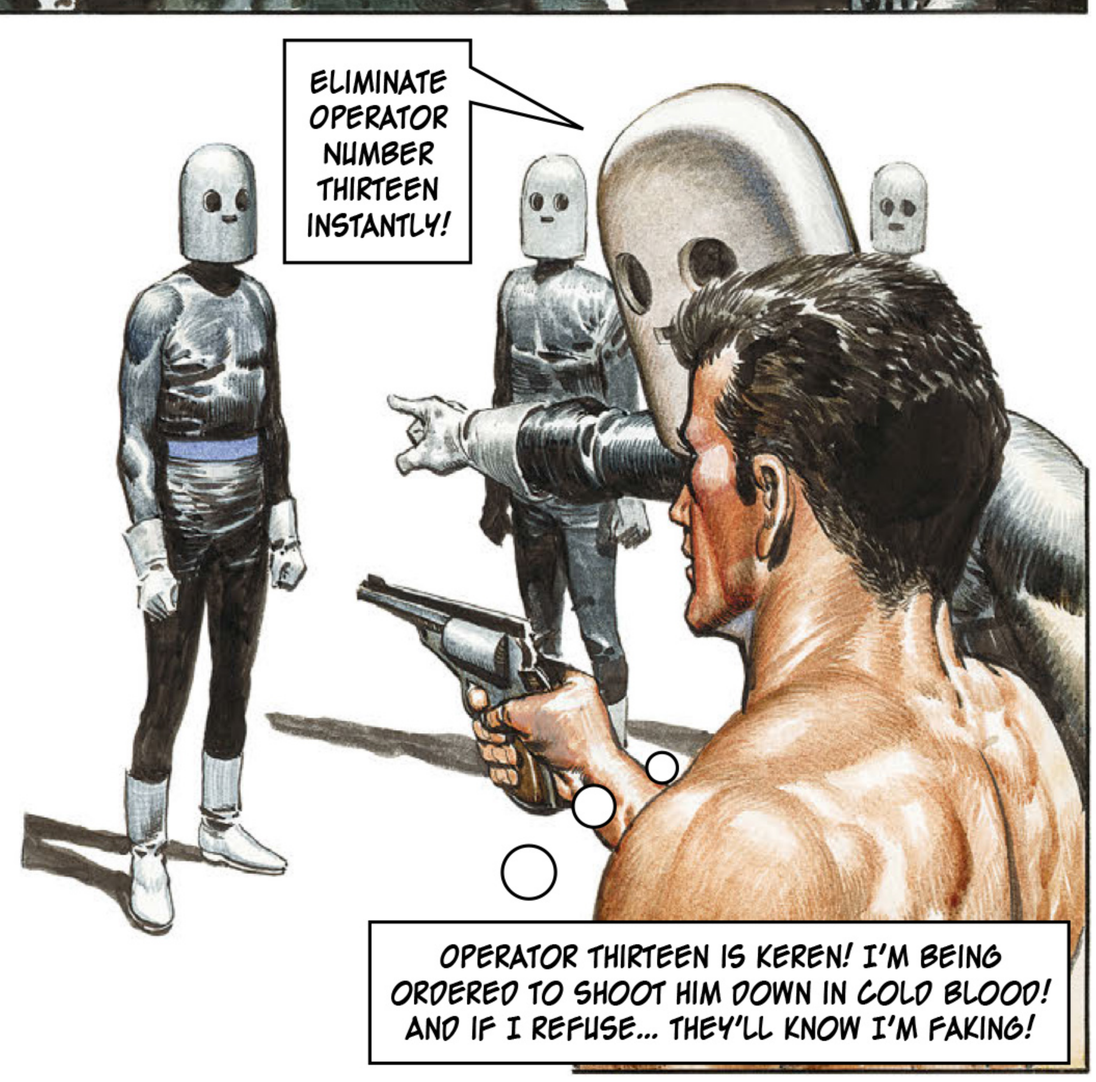
THERE HE SUPPED. AND THEN...
MAY YOU ENJOY SWEET DREAMS, GOOD MASTER! HEH, HEH!

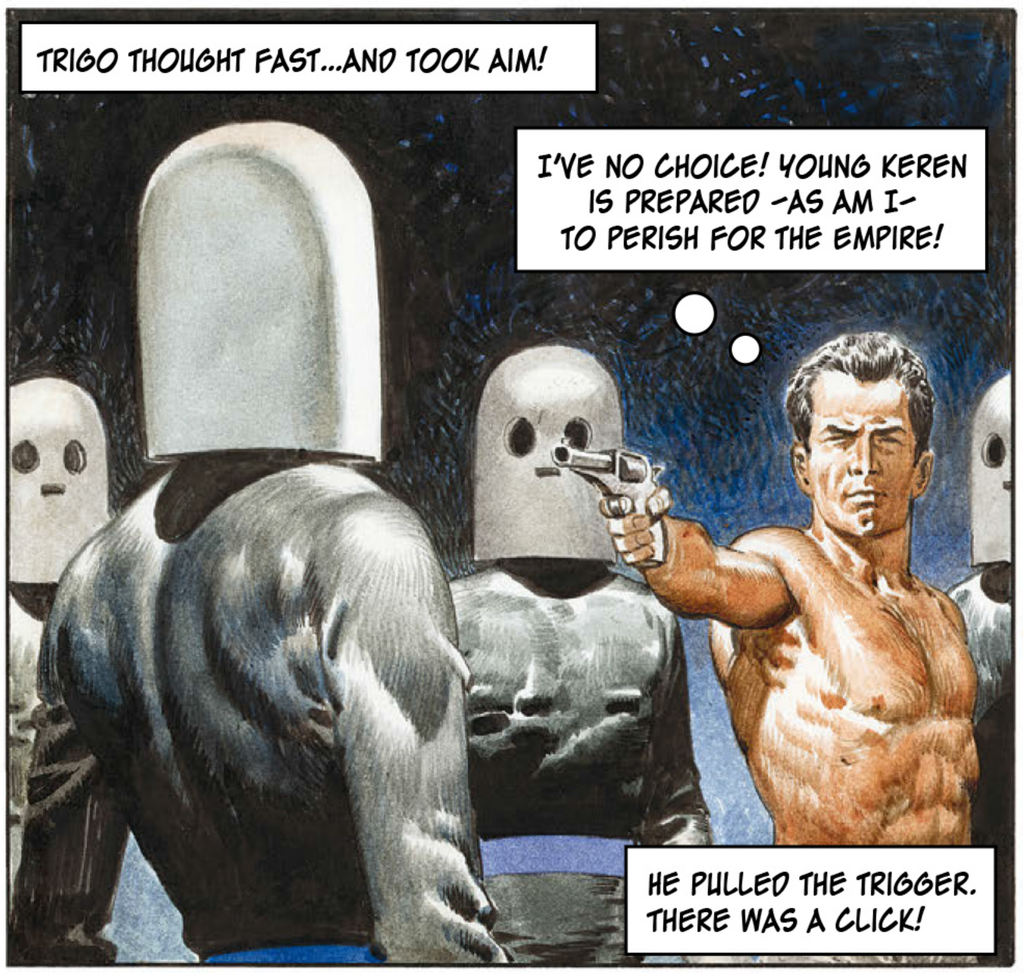
THE FIENDISH BED...
AAAAAAAGH!

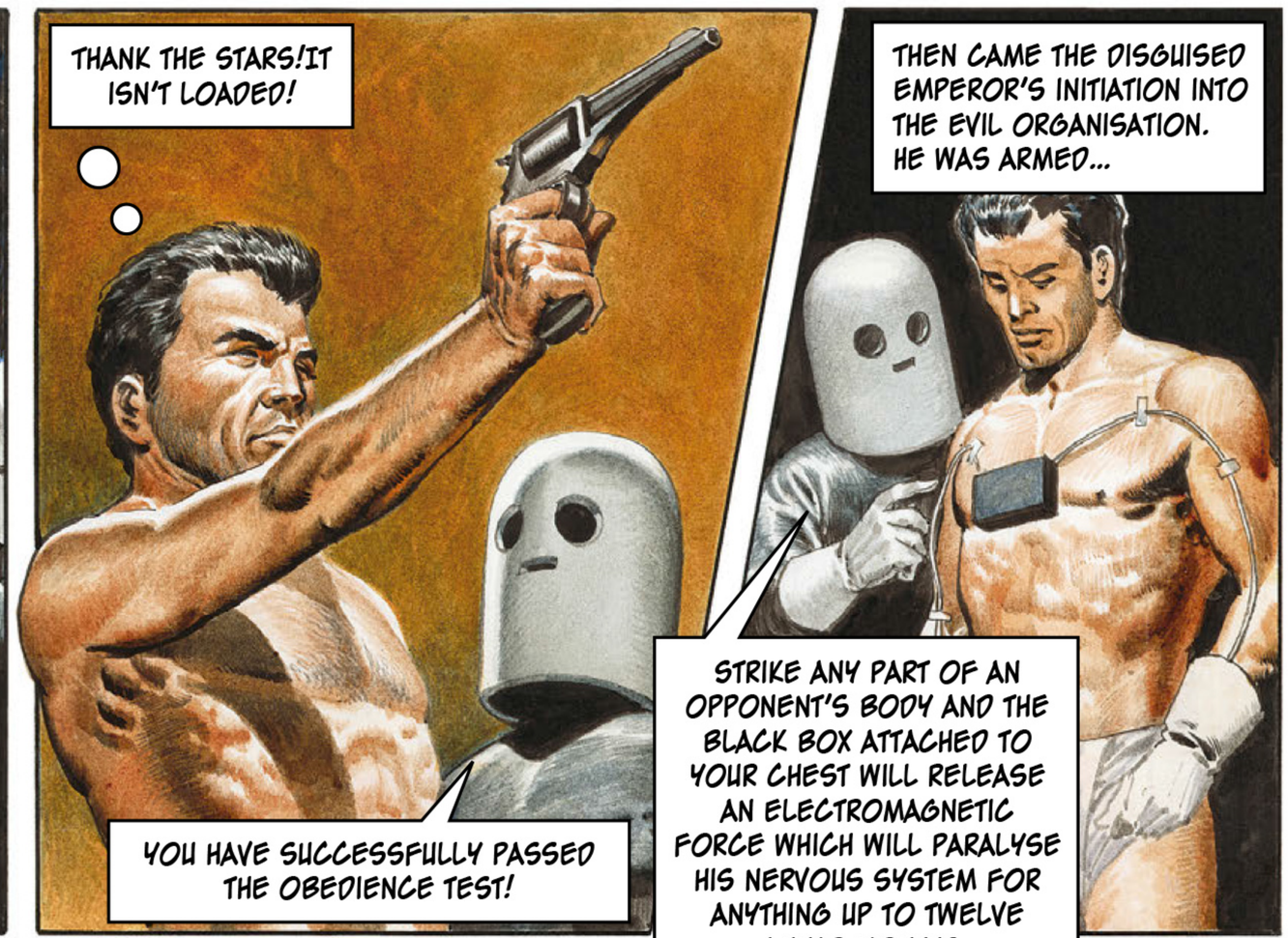

... PITCHED HIM SENSELESS AT THE FEET OF THE WHITE-MASKED RAIDERS.

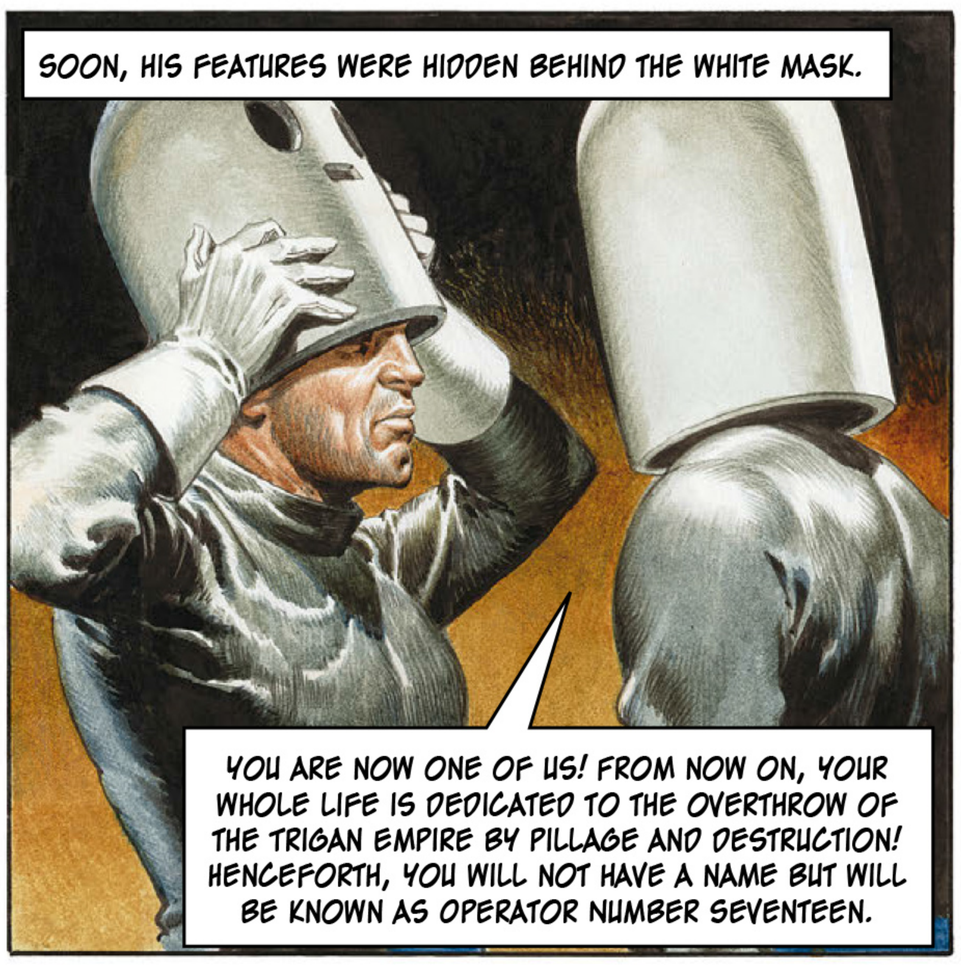

TRIGO RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS TO HEAR A DRONING VOICE REPEATING AND REPEATING IN HIS EARS.
YOUR WILL IS NO LONGER YOUR OWN... YOU WILL OBEY... OBEDIENCE IS EVERYTHING... IS EVERYTHING... IS EVERYTHING...

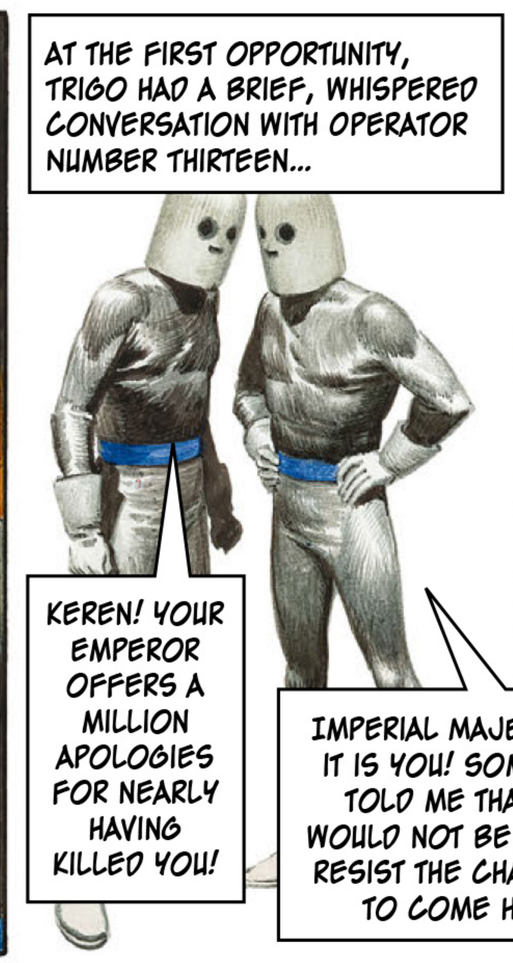

WHEN THIS WAS OVER, A PISTOL WAS PUT IN HIS HAND.
WE WILL ENSURE THAT YOU ACCEPT ALL ORDERS UNQUESTIONINGLY! YOU WILL USE THE WEAPON IN YOUR HAND...
OPERATOR NUMBER THIRTEEN... STEP FORWARD!

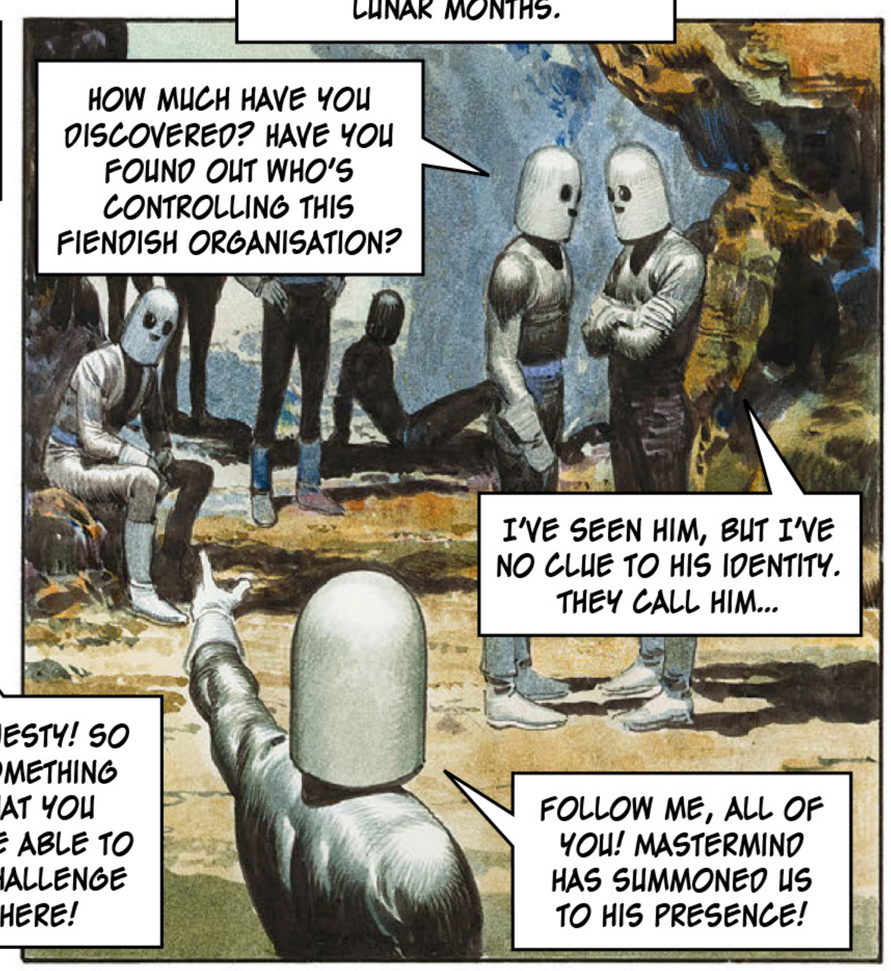

ELIMINATE OPERATOR NUMBER THIRTEEN INSTANTLY!
OPERATOR THIRTEEN IS KEREN! I'M BEING ORDERED TO SHOOT HIM DOWN IN COLD BLOOD! AND IF I REFUSE... THEY'LL KNOW I'M FAKING!

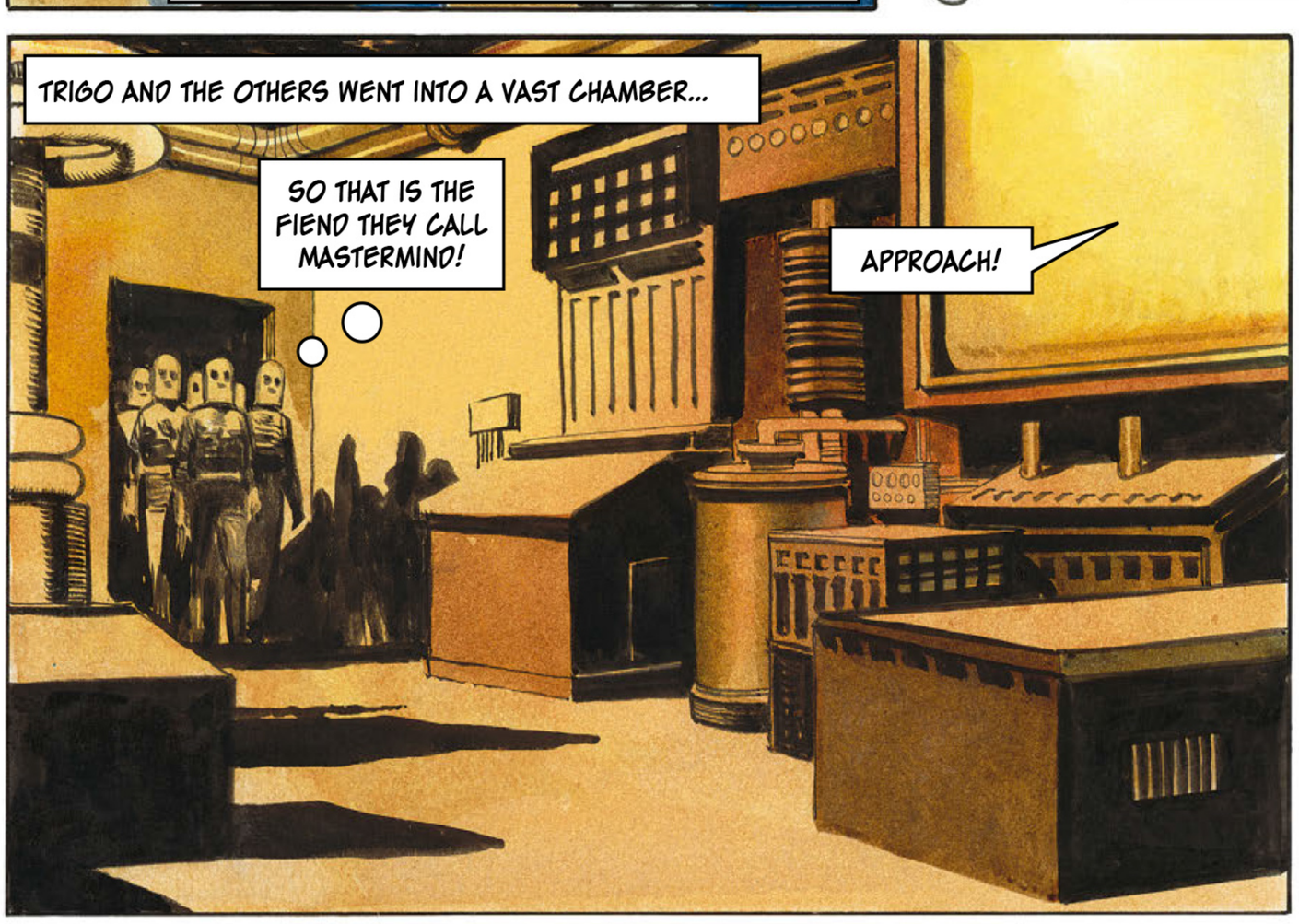

TRIGO THOUGHT FAST...AND TOOK AIM!
I'VE NO CHOICE! YOUNG KEREN IS PREPARED -AS AM I- TO PERISH FOR THE EMPIRE!
HE PULLED THE TRIGGER. THERE WAS A CLICK!


THANK THE STARS!IT ISN'T LOADED!
YOU HAVE SUCCESSFULLY PASSED THE OBEDIENCE TEST!
THEN CAME THE DISGUISED EMPEROR'S INITIATION INTO THE EVIL ORGANISATION. HE WAS ARMED...
STRIKE ANY PART OF AN OPPONENT'S BODY AND THE BLACK BOX ATTACHED TO YOUR CHEST WILL RELEASE AN ELECTROMAGNETIC FORCE WHICH WILL PARALYSE HIS NERVOUS SYSTEM FOR ANYTHING UP TO TWELVE LUNAR MONTHS.

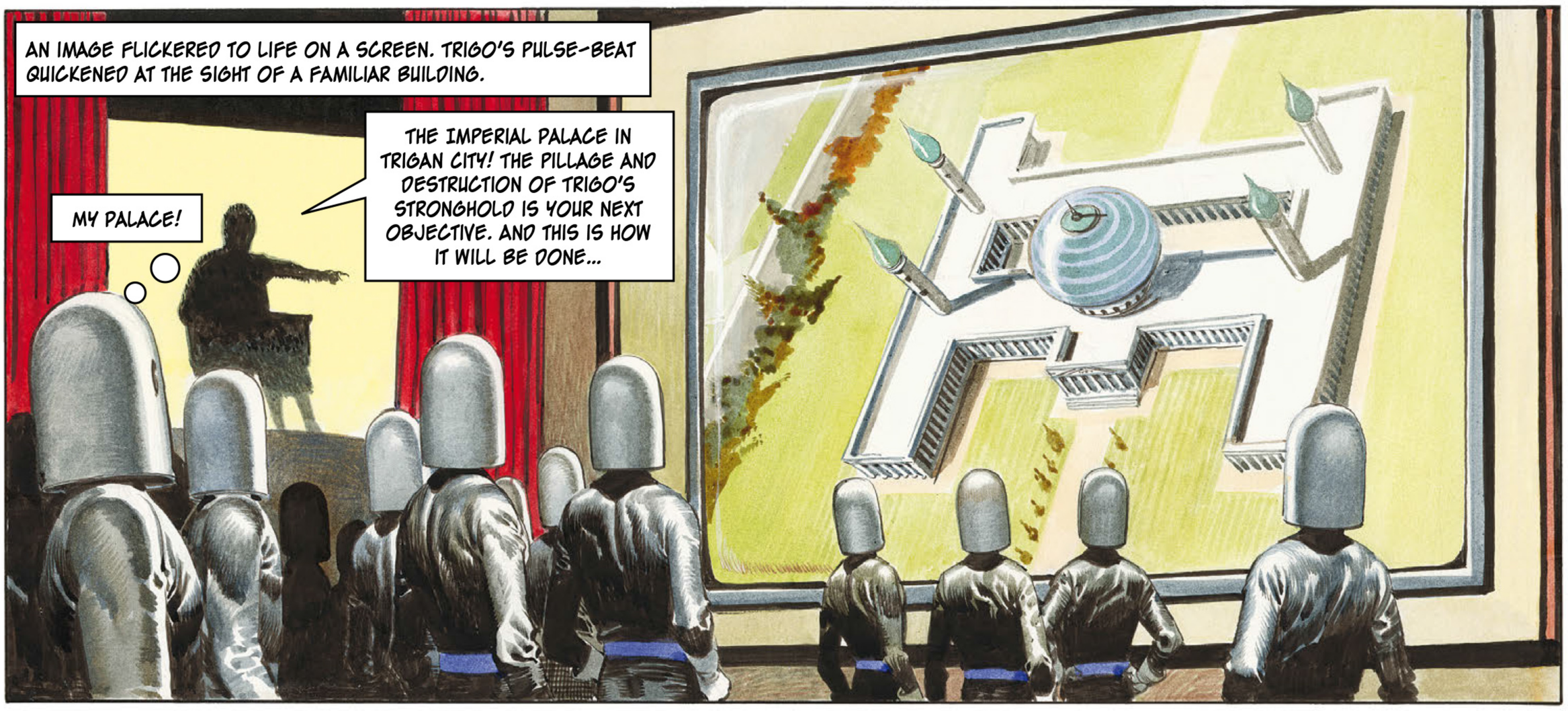

SOON, HIS FEATURES WERE HIDDEN BEHIND THE WHITE MASK.
YOU ARE NOW ONE OF US! FROM NOW ON, YOUR WHOLE LIFE IS DEDICATED TO THE OVERTHROW OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE BY PILLAGE AND DESTRUCTION! HENCEFORTH, YOU WILL NOT HAVE A NAME BUT WILL BE KNOWN AS OPERATOR NUMBER SEVENTEEN.

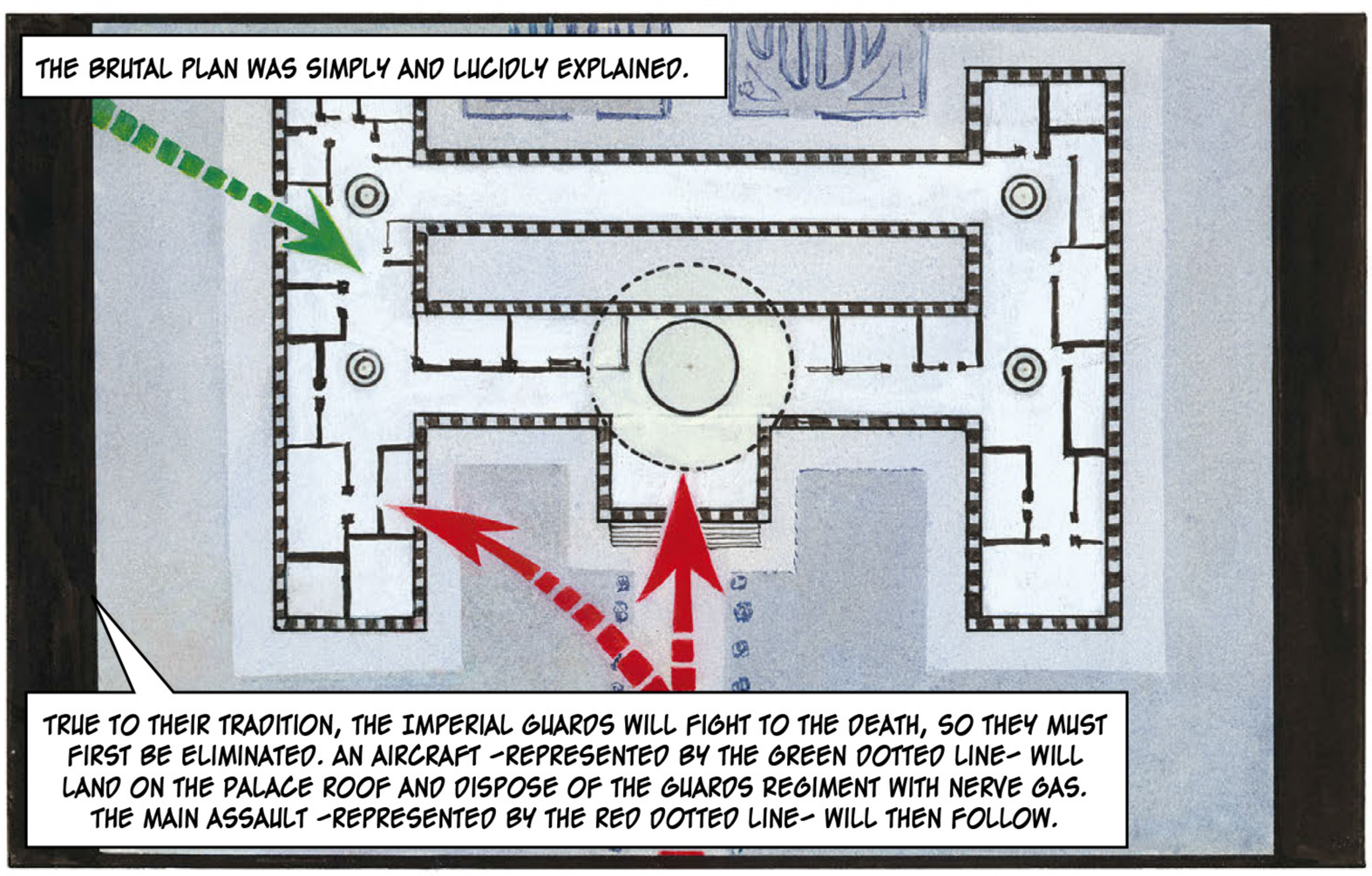

AT THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY, TRIGO HAD A BRIEF, WHISPERED CONVERSATION WITH OPERATOR NUMBER THIRTEEN...
KEREN! YOUR EMPEROR OFFERS A MILLION APOLOGIES FOR NEARLY HAVING KILLED YOU!
IMPERIAL MAJESTY! SO IT IS YOU! SOMETHING TOLD ME THAT YOU WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RESIST THE CHALLENGE TO COME HERE!

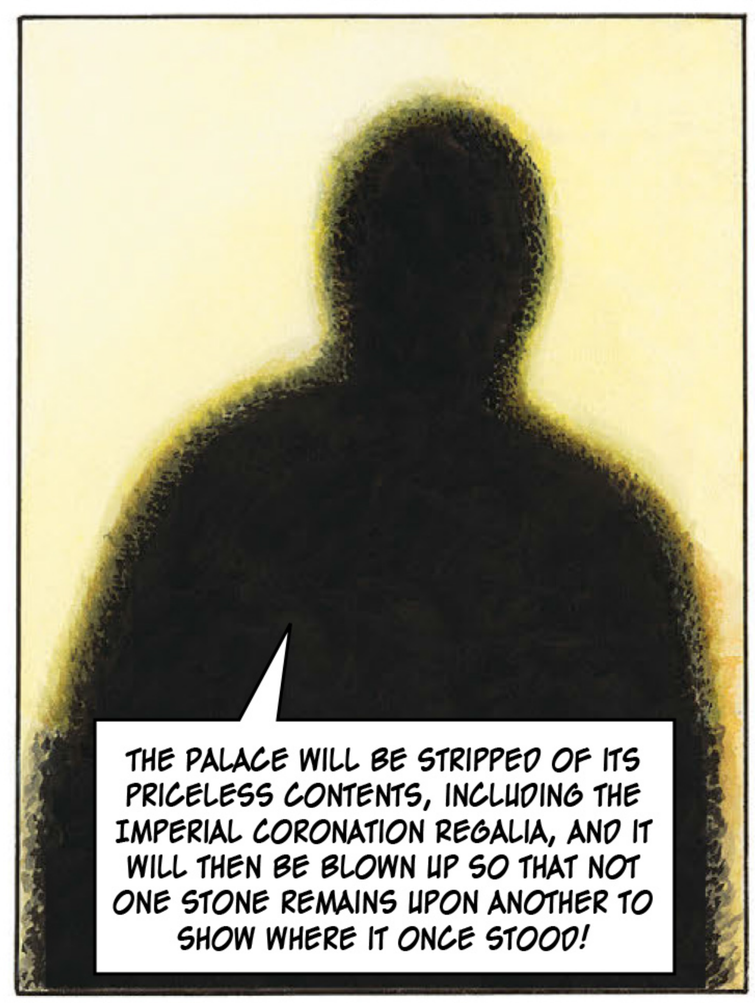

HOW MUCH HAVE YOU DISCOVERED? HAVE YOU FOUND OUT WHO'S CONTROLLING THIS FIENDISH ORGANISATION?
I'VE SEEN HIM, BUT I'VE NO CLUE TO HIS IDENTITY. THEY CALL HIM...
FOLLOW ME, ALL OF YOU! MASTERMIND HAS SUMMONED US TO HIS PRESENCE!

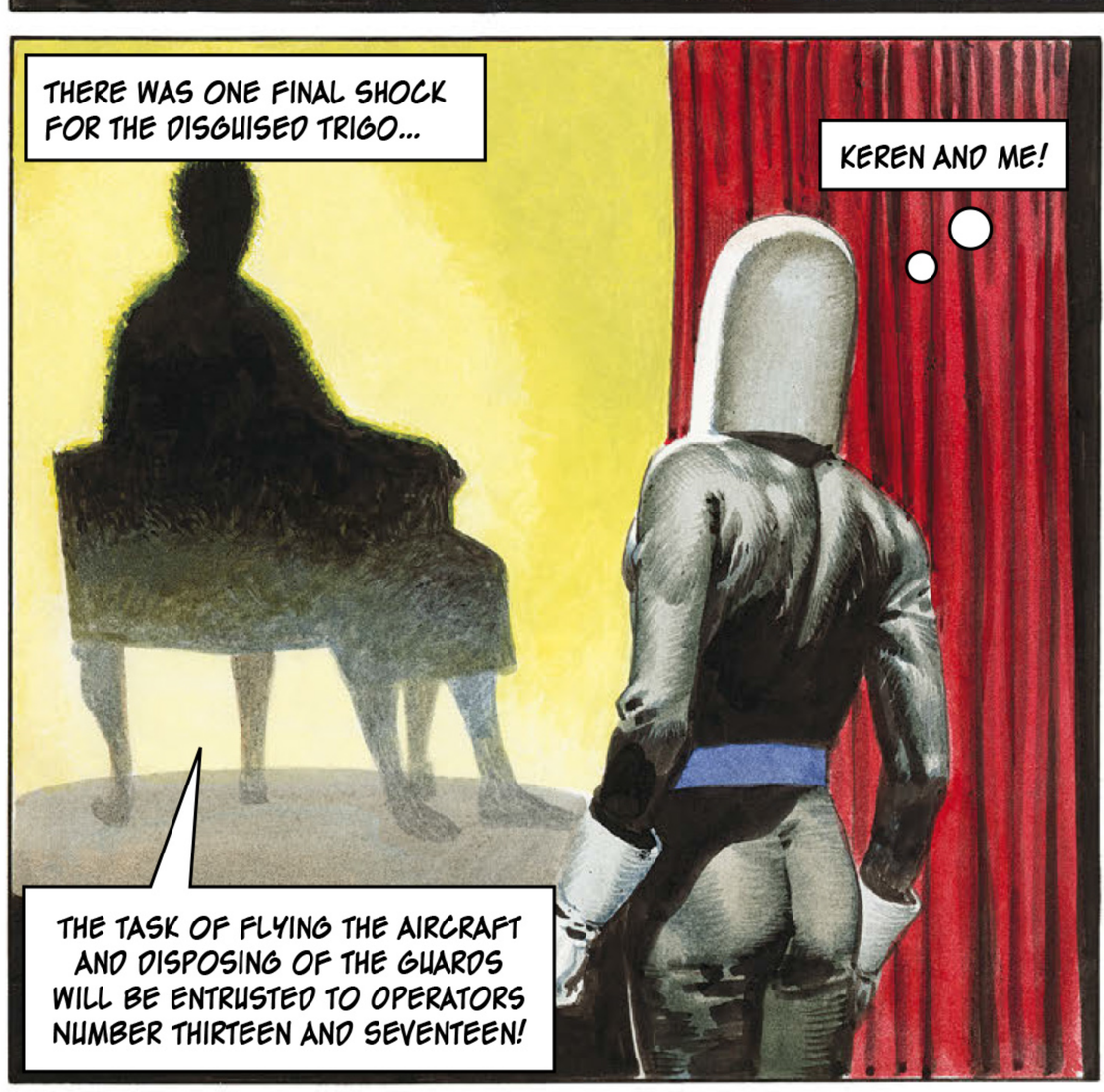

TRIGO AND THE OTHERS WENT INTO A VAST CHAMBER...
SO THAT IS THE FIEND THEY CALL MASTERMIND!
APPROACH!

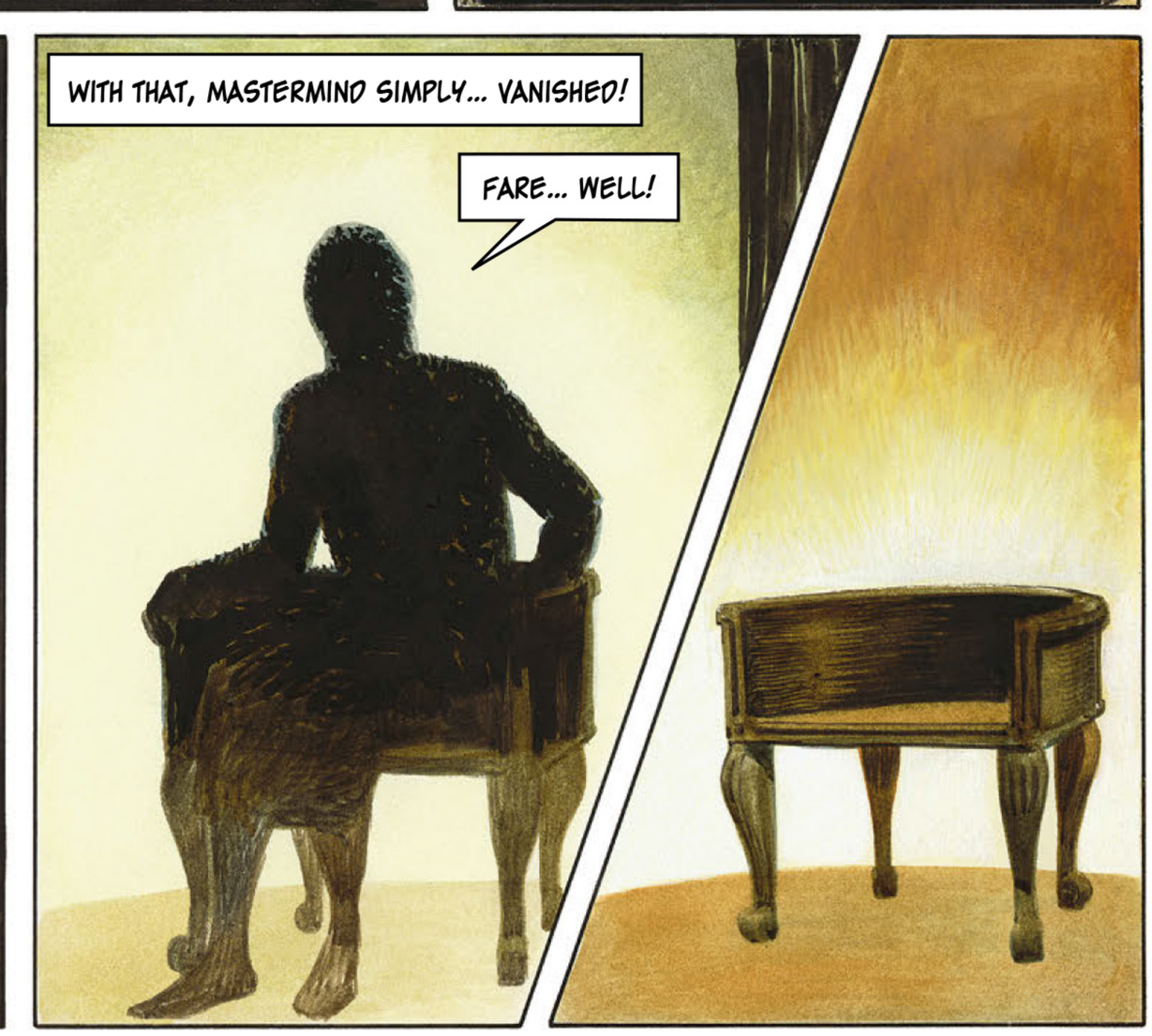
MASTERMIND'S VOICE, AMPLIFIED BY LOUD SPEAKERS, CAME FROM ALL SIDES OF THE CHAMBER.
PAY ATTENTION! I WILL NOW PROCEED TO GIVE YOU DETAILS OF THE NEXT OPERATION!

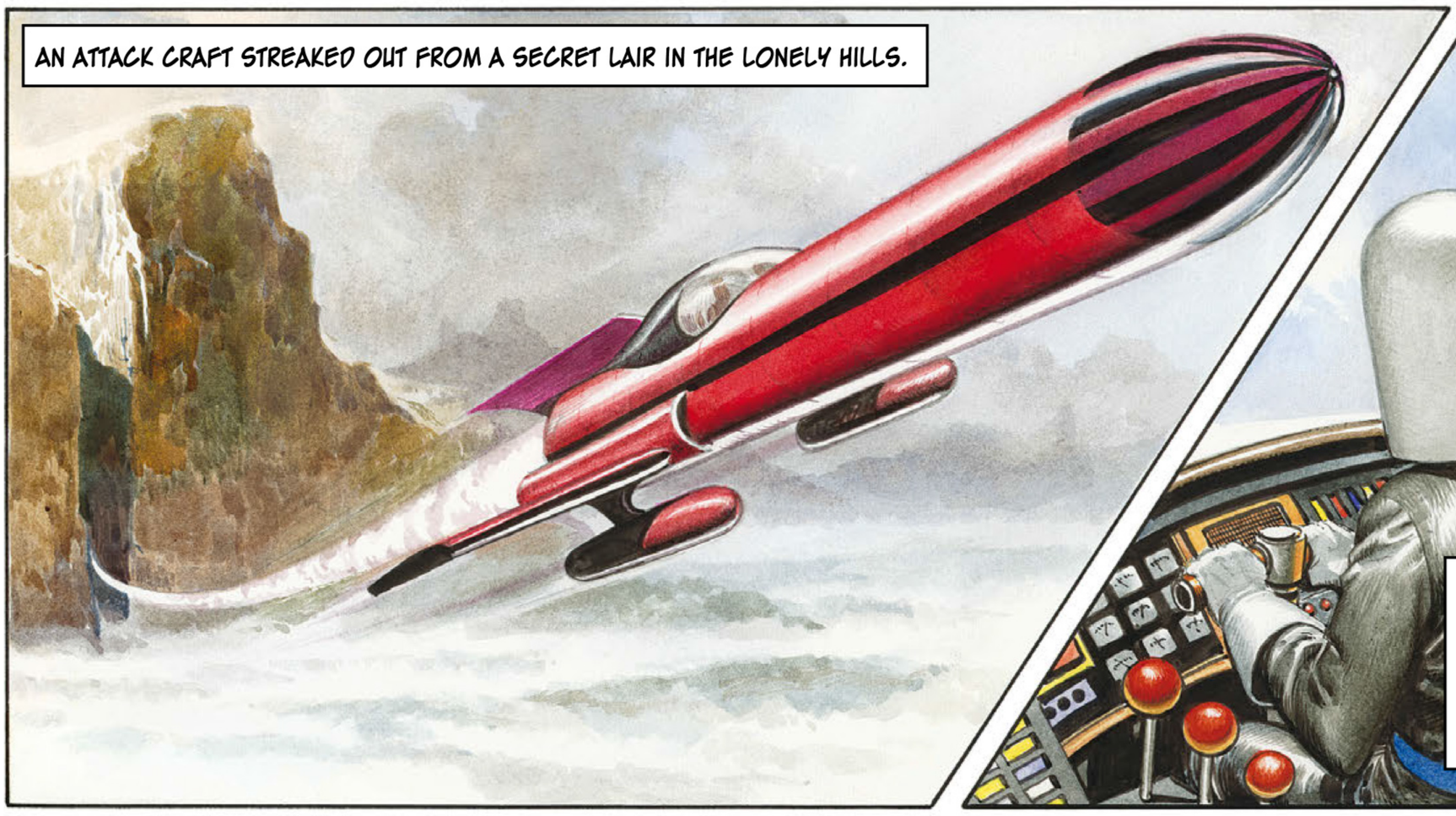

AN IMAGE FLICKERED TO LIFE ON A SCREEN. TRIGO'S PULSE-BEAT QUICKENED AT THE SIGHT OF A FAMILIAR BUILDING.
MY PALACE!
THE IMPERIAL PALACE IN TRIGAN CITY! THE PILLAGE AND DESTRUCTION OF TRIGO'S STRONGHOLD IS YOUR NEXT OBJECTIVE. AND THIS IS HOW IT WILL BE DONE...

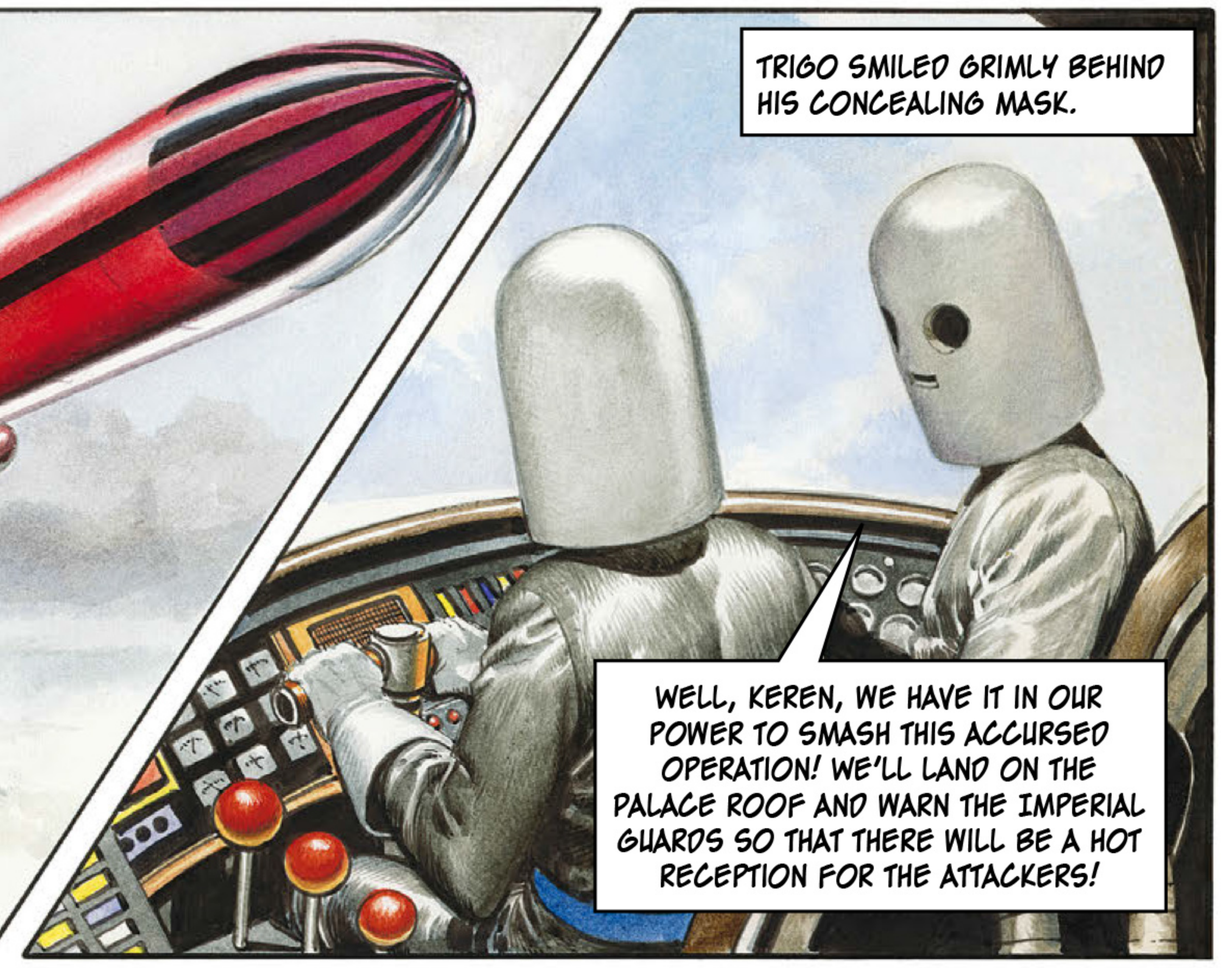

THE BRUTAL PLAN WAS SIMPLY AND LUCIDLY EXPLAINED.
TRUE TO THEIR TRADITION, THE IMPERIAL GUARDS WILL FIGHT TO THE DEATH, SO THEY MUST FIRST BE ELIMINATED. AN AIRCRAFT -REPRESENTED BY THE GREEN DOTTED LINE- WILL LAND ON THE PALACE ROOF AND DISPOSE OF THE GUARDS REGIMENT WITH NERVE GAS. THE MAIN ASSAULT -REPRESENTED BY THE RED DOTTED LINE- WILL THEN FOLLOW.

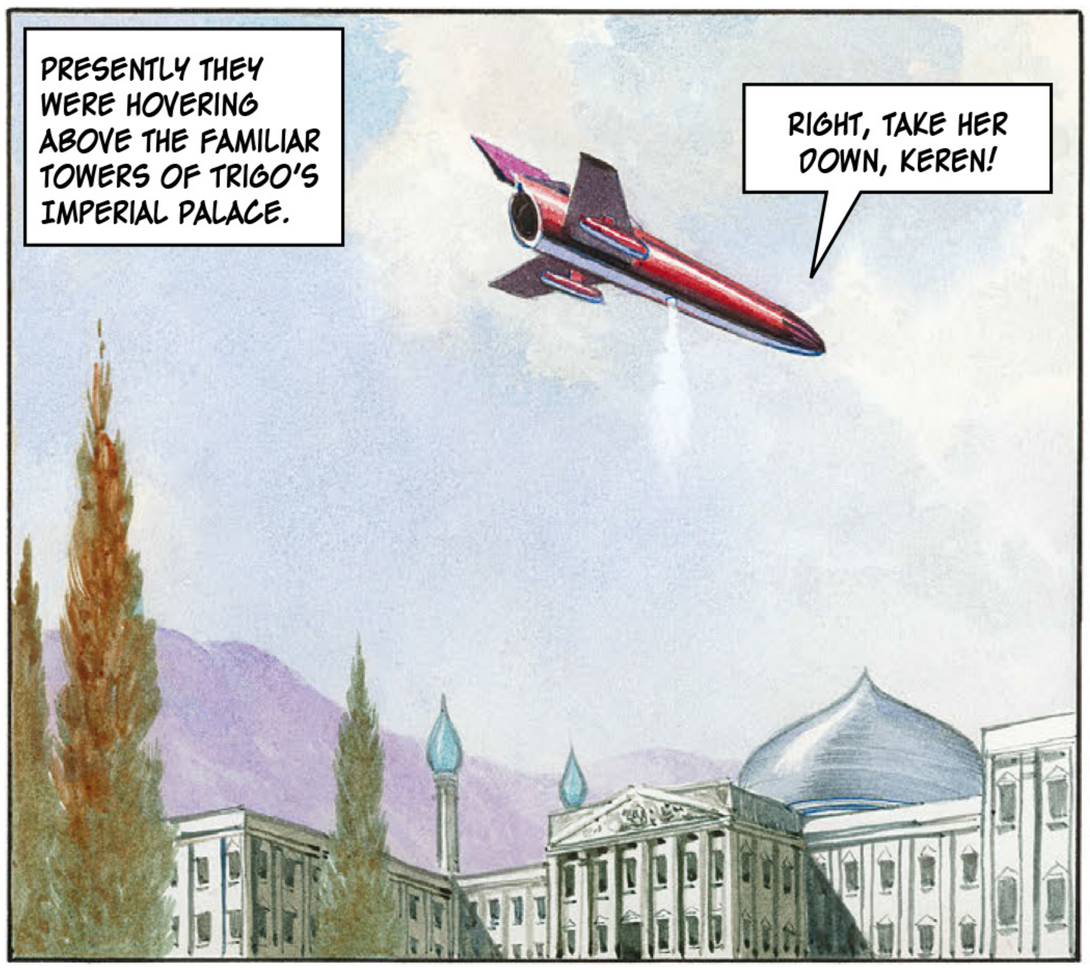

THE PALACE WILL BE STRIPPED OF ITS PRICELESS CONTENTS, INCLUDING THE IMPERIAL CORONATION REGALIA, AND IT WILL THEN BE BLOWN UP SO THAT NOT ONE STONE REMAINS UPON ANOTHER TO SHOW WHERE IT ONCE STOOD!

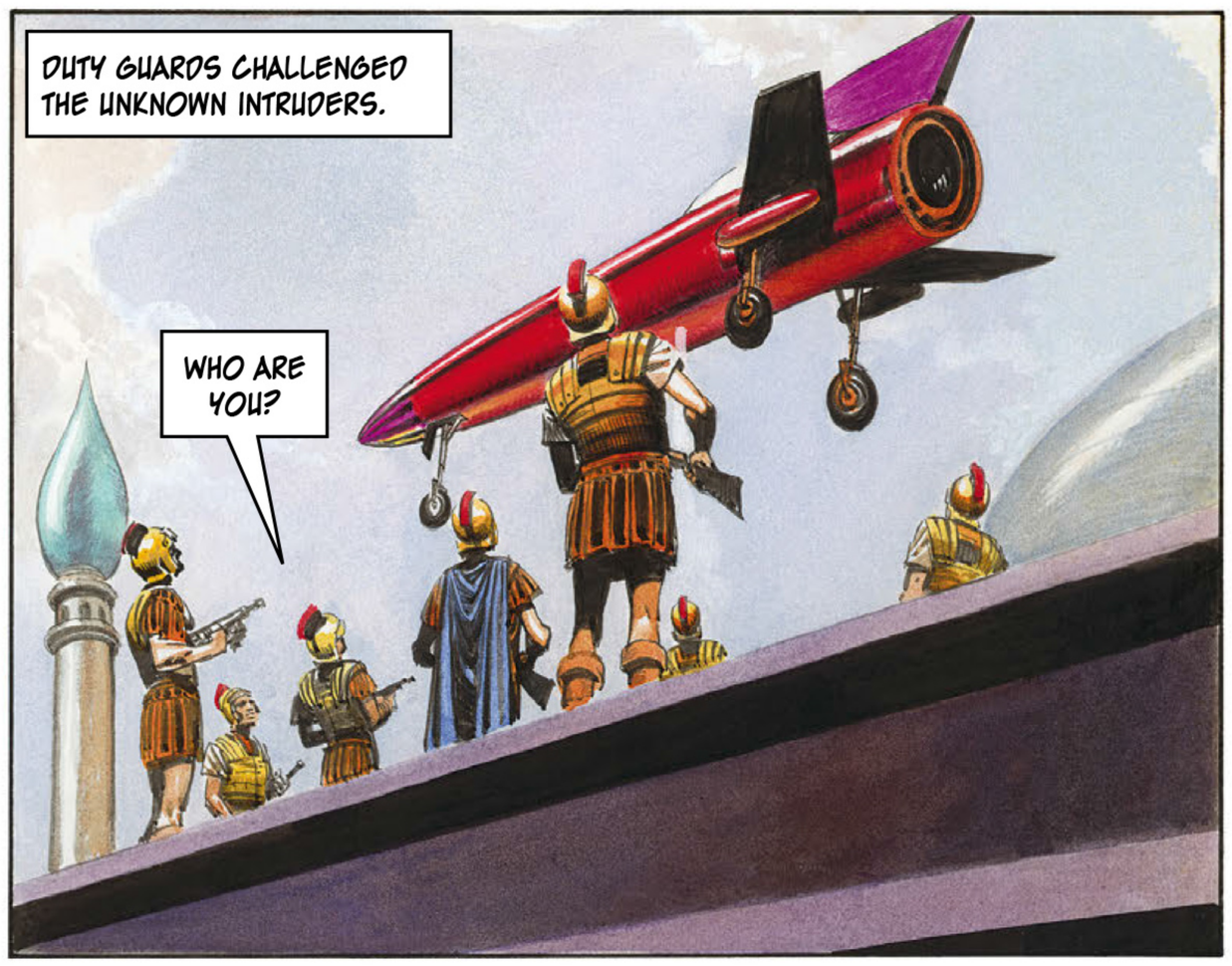

THERE WAS ONE FINAL SHOCK FOR THE DISGUISED TRIGO...
KEREN AND ME!
THE TASK OF FLYING THE AIRCRAFT AND DISPOSING OF THE GUARDS WILL BE ENTRUSTED TO OPERATORS NUMBER THIRTEEN AND SEVENTEEN!


WITH THAT, MASTERMIND SIMPLY... VANISHED!
FARE... WELL!


AN ATTACK CRAFT STREAKED OUT FROM A SECRET LAIR IN THE LONELY HILLS.

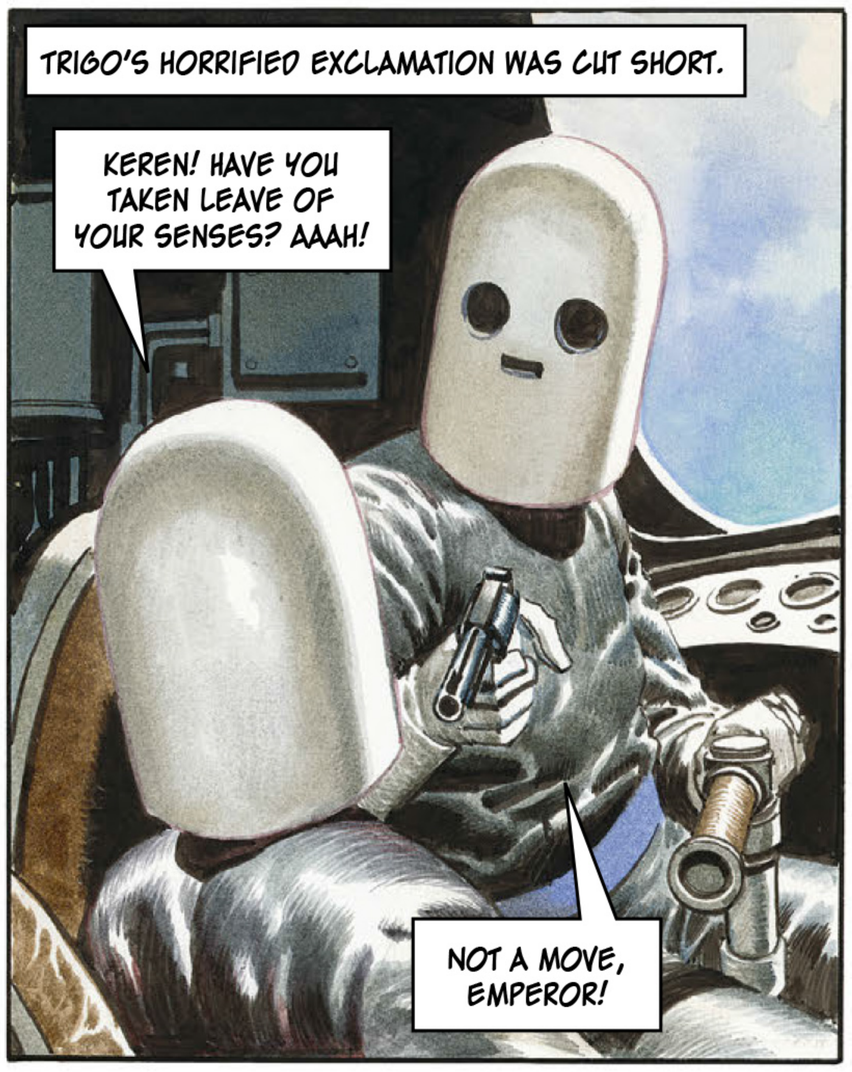

TRIGO SMILED GRIMLY BEHIND HIS CONCEALING MASK.
WELL, KEREN, WE HAVE IT IN OUR POWER TO SMASH THIS ACCURSED OPERATION! WE'LL LAND ON THE PALACE ROOF AND WARN THE IMPERIAL GUARDS SO THAT THERE WILL BE A HOT RECEPTION FOR THE ATTACKERS!

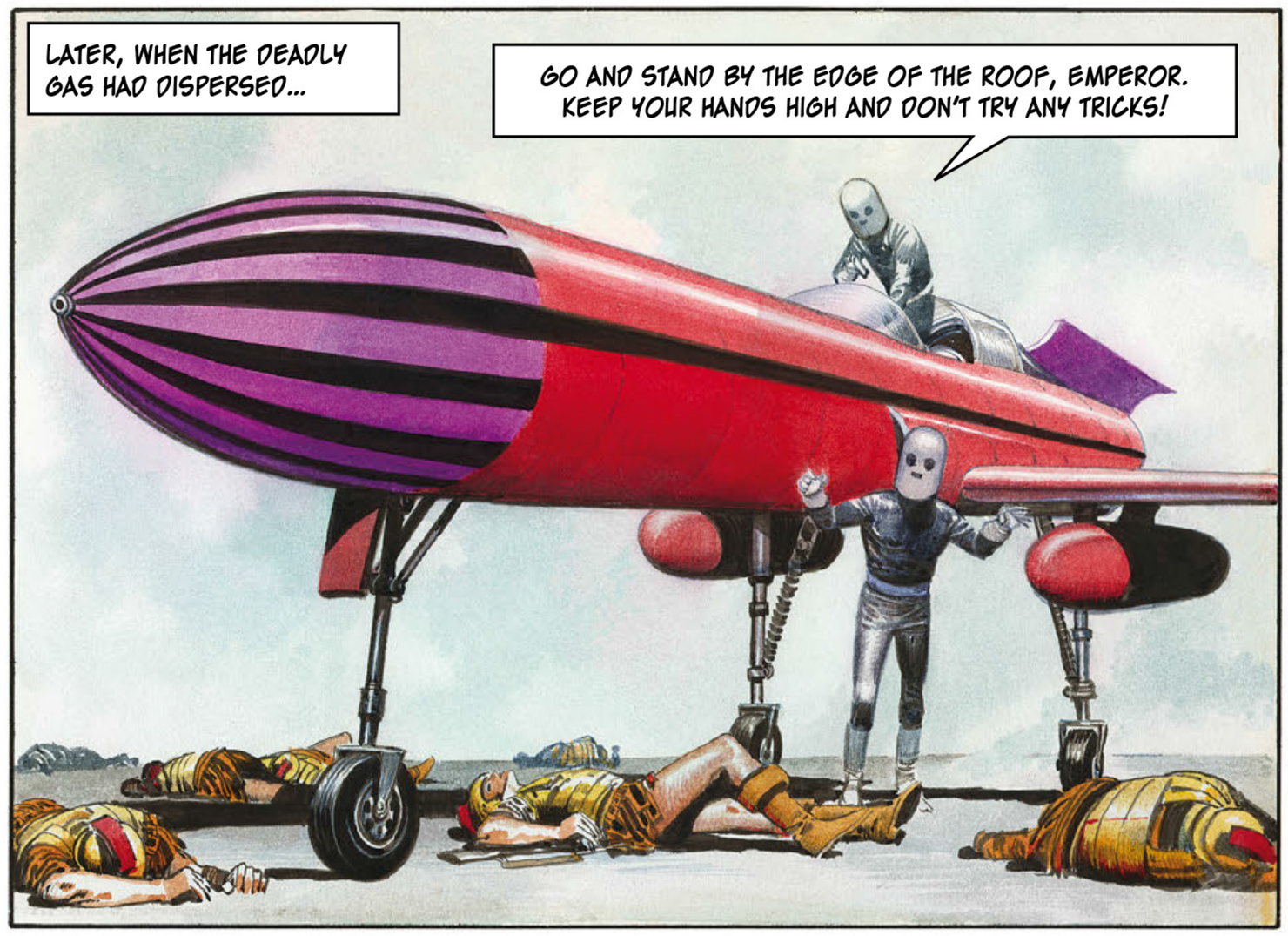

PRESENTLY THEY WERE HOVERING ABOVE THE FAMILIAR TOWERS OF TRIGO'S IMPERIAL PALACE.
RIGHT, TAKE HER DOWN, KEREN!

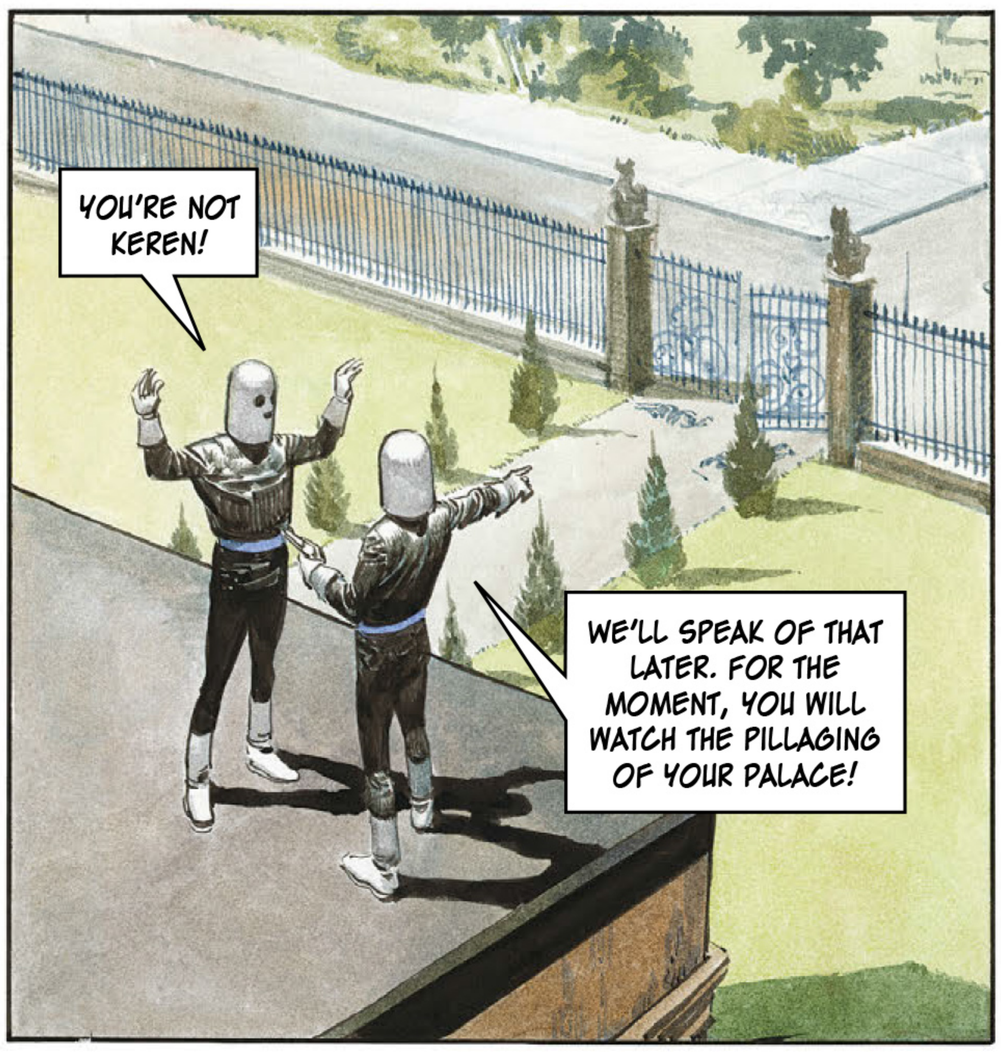

DUTY GUARDS CHALLENGED THE UNKNOWN INTRUDERS.
WHO ARE YOU?

IN THE CRAFT, A GLOVED HAND REACHED OUT FOR THE LEVER.

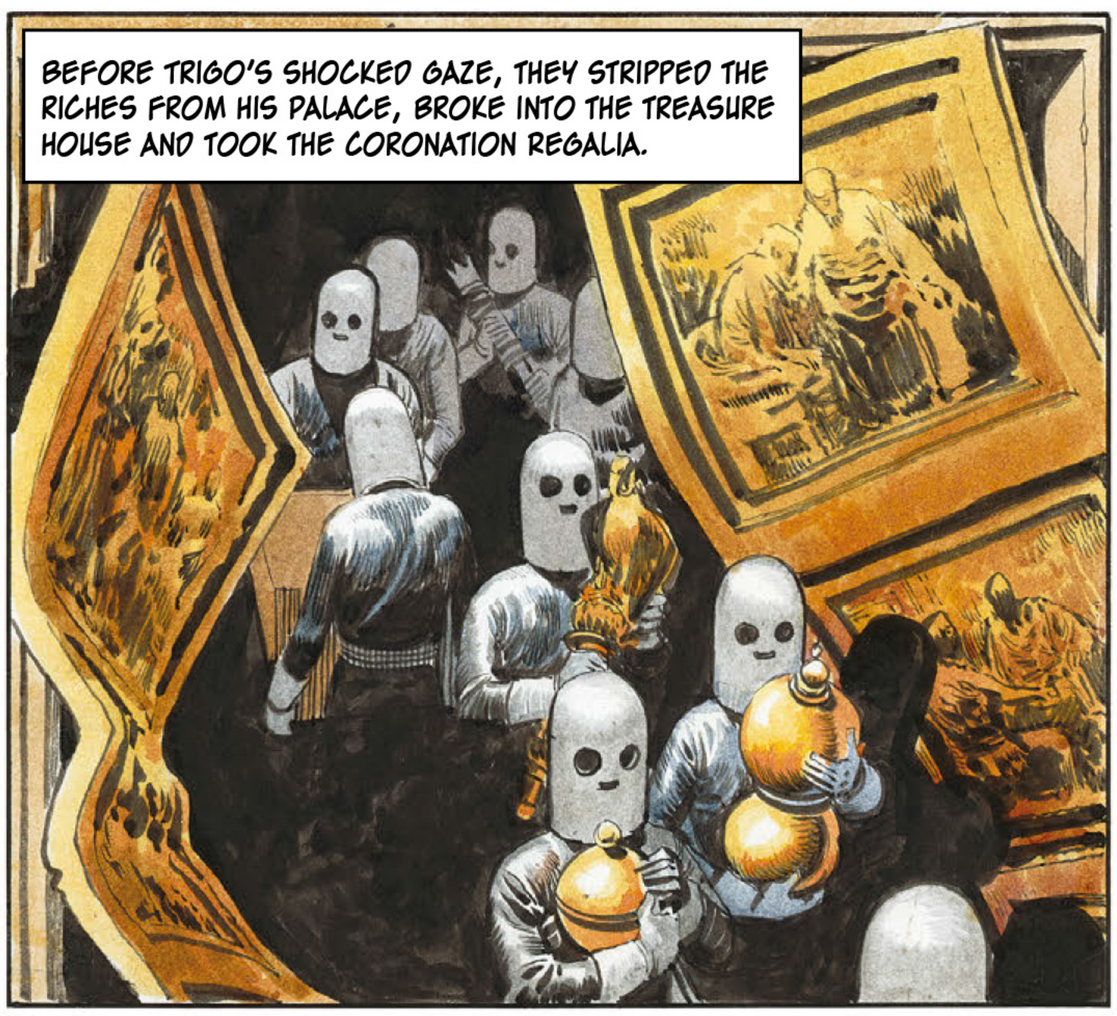
THEN... IT HAPPENED! PARALYSING NERVE GAS JETTED FROM THE CRAFT, SWIFTLY ENVELOPING THE WHOLE PALACE!


TRIGO'S HORRIFIED EXCLAMATION WAS CUT SHORT.
KEREN! HAVE YOU TAKEN LEAVE OF YOUR SENSES? AAAH!
NOT A MOVE, EMPEROR!


LATER, WHEN THE DEADLY GAS HAD DISPERSED...
GO AND STAND BY THE EDGE OF THE ROOF, EMPEROR. KEEP YOUR HANDS HIGH AND DON'T TRY ANY TRICKS!

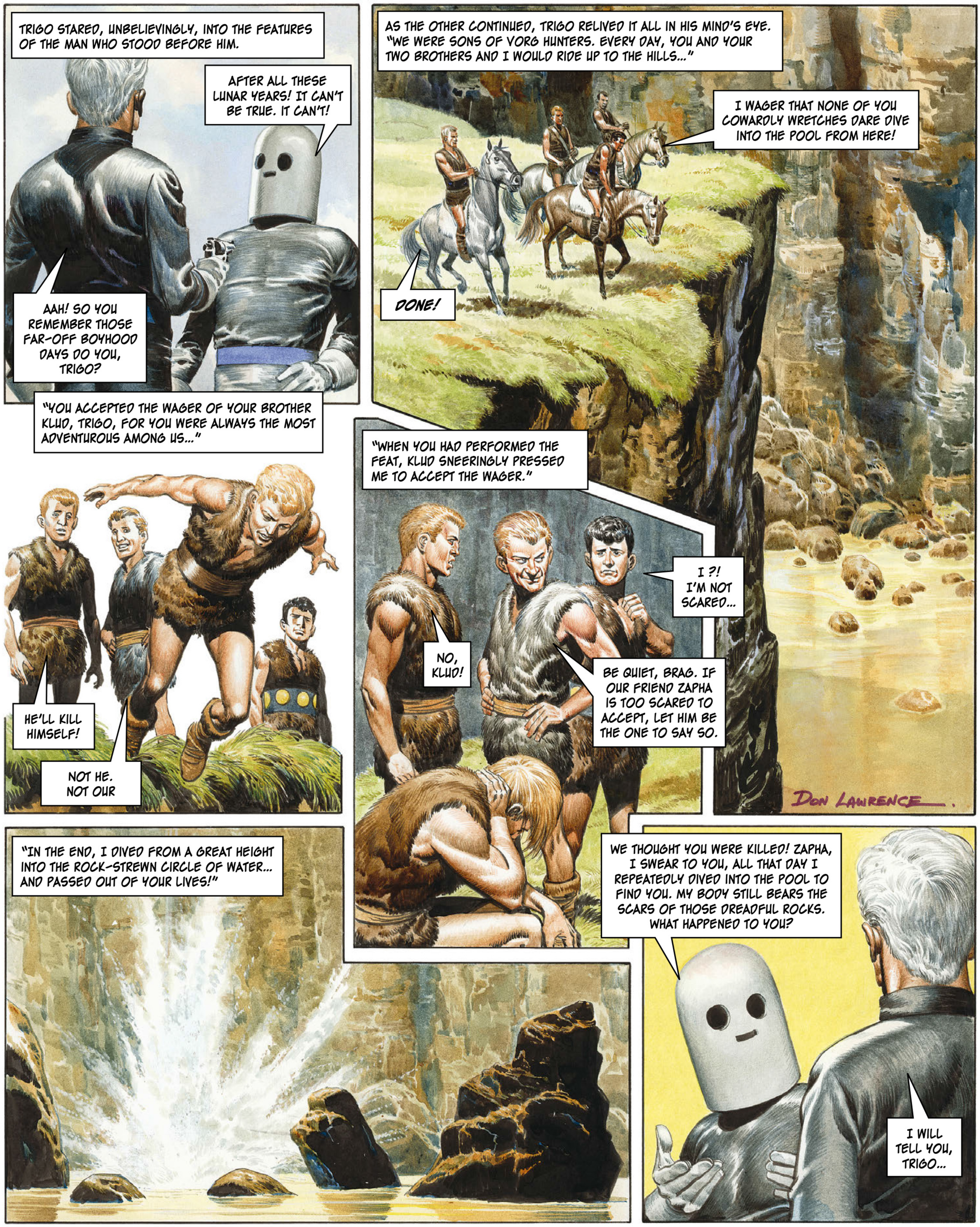

YOU'RE NOT KEREN!
WE'LL SPEAK OF THAT LATER. FOR THE MOMENT, YOU WILL WATCH THE PILLAGING OF YOUR PALACE!

THEY STREAMED THROUGH THE UNGUARDED GATES, PAST THE UNCONSCIOUS GUARDS, JUST AS THEIR LEADER, MASTERMIND, HAD PLANNED...
BEHOLD!


BEFORE TRIGO'S SHOCKED GAZE, THEY STRIPPED THE RICHES FROM HIS PALACE, BROKE INTO THE TREASURE HOUSE AND TOOK THE CORONATION REGALIA.

THE EMPEROR'S COMPANION GAVE A MIRTHLESS LAUGH.
BY ALL THE STARS, WHO ARE YOU?
HA! YOUR EMPIRE IS CRUMBLING AROUND YOUR EARS, TRIGO! THIS IS MY MOMENT OF TRIUMPH, FOR SOON YOU WILL BE LYING DEAD AMID THE RUINS OF THIS PALACE!

THE CRIMINAL REMOVED HIS MASK TO REVEAL...
NO! IT CAN'T BE! NOT YOU!


TRIGO STARED, UNBELIEVINGLY, INTO THE FEATURES OF THE MAN WHO STOOD BEFORE HIM.
AFTER ALL THESE LUNAR YEARS! IT CAN'T BE TRUE. IT CAN'T!
AAH! SO YOU REMEMBER THOSE FAR-OFF BOYHOOD DAYS DO YOU, TRIGO?
"YOU ACCEPTED THE WAGER OF YOUR BROTHER KLUD, TRIGO, FOR YOU WERE ALWAYS THE MOST ADVENTUROUS AMONG US..."
HE'LL KILL HIMSELF!
NOT HE. NOT OUR
"IN THE END, I DIVED FROM A GREAT HEIGHT INTO THE ROCK-STREWN CIRCLE OF WATER... AND PASSED OUT OF YOUR LIVES!"
AS THE OTHER CONTINUED, TRIGO RELIVED IT ALL IN HIS MIND'S EYE. "WE WERE SONS OF VORG HUNTERS. EVERY DAY, YOU AND YOUR TWO BROTHERS AND I WOULD RIDE UP TO THE HILLS..."
I WAGER THAT NONE OF YOU COWARDLY WRETCHES DARE DIVE INTO THE POOL FROM HERE!
DONE!
"WHEN YOU HAD PERFORMED THE FEAT, KLUD SNEERINGLY PRESSED ME TO ACCEPT THE WAGER."
I ?! I'M NOT SCARED...
NO, KLUD!
BE QUIET, BRAG. IF OUR FRIEND ZAPHA IS TOO SCARED TO ACCEPT, LET HIM BE THE ONE TO SAY SO.
DON LAWRENCE
WE THOUGHT YOU WERE KILLED! ZAPHA, I SWEAR TO YOU, ALL THAT DAY I REPEATEDLY DIVED INTO THE POOL TO FIND YOU. MY BODY STILL BEARS THE SCARS OF THOSE DREADFUL ROCKS. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
I WILL TELL YOU, TRIGO...

"I WAS SWEPT INTO A SUBTERRANEAN CAVERN FAR BENEATH THE CLIFFS. THERE, IN THE GLOOM, MY NOSTRILS WERE ASSAILED BY AN INDESCRIBABLE STENCH. NEARBY, SOMETHING STIRRED..."

WHAT NIGHTMARE THING IS THAT?

"I HAD VENTURED INTO THE SECRET DEN OF THE MOST HIDEOUS BEAST THAT NATURE, BY SOME GHASTLY OVERSIGHT, HAD EVER PRODUCED!"

NO! THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING TO ME!

"FOR WHAT SEEMED AN ETERNITY, I REMAINED IN THE FOUL-SMELLING GLOOM WITH THAT THING. FROM TIME TO TIME, I HEARD THE CLASHING OF ITS FANGS. SOMETIMES, I THOUGHT THE TERRIBLE EYES MUST SEE ME..."

I CAN'T BEAR IT ANY LONGER...

"NOT UNTIL THE THING LEFT ITS DEN WAS I ABLE TO VENTURE FORTH INTO THE SUNLIGHT. BY THEN MY MEMORY WAS DESTROYED AND MY HAIR HAD TURNED WHITE WITH SHOCK."

WHERE... WHO AM I?

"IN THE EMPTY YEARS THAT FOLLOWED, I BECAME A WANDERER OVER THE FACE OF THE PLANET. GRADUALLY MY MEMORY RETURNED AND, WITH IT, A CRAVING..."

REVENGE! REVENGE! REVENGE!

I SWORE ETERNAL REVENGE AGAINST THE FAMILY WHO HAD DESTROYED SO MANY YEARS OF MY YOUTH. BUT KLUD IS DEAD AND BRAG IS A NONENTITY. YOU, HOWEVER, HAVE BECOME THE RULER OF THE GREATEST POWER ON ELEKTON, SO IT IS UPON YOU THAT THE FULL FORCE OF MY REVENGE SHALL FALL!

MASTERMIND IS NOTHING BUT AN ILLUSION. A THING OF LENSES AND MIRRORS TO IMPRESS THE CAPTIVE MINDS OF THE DUPES WHO DO MY BIDDING!

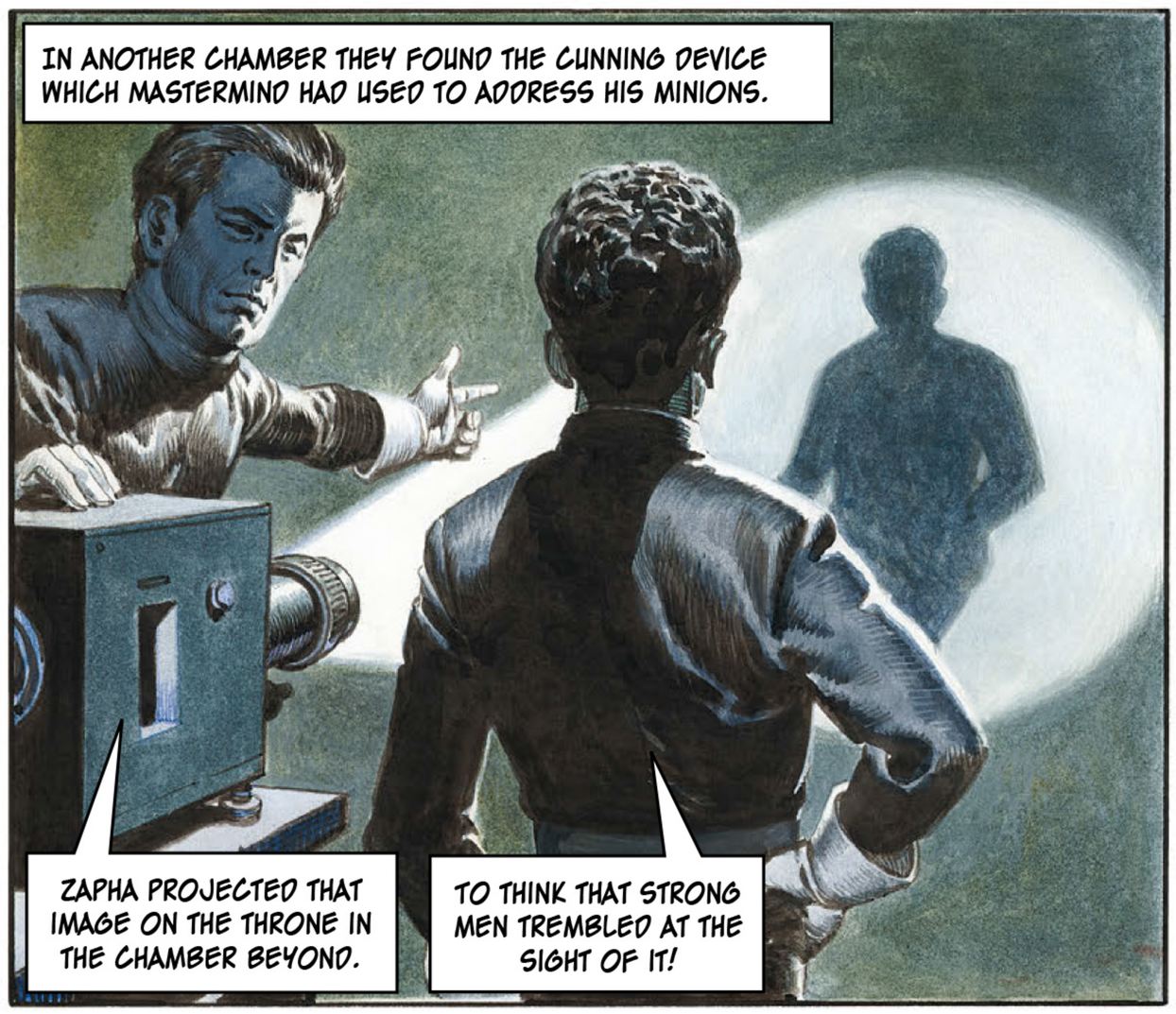
YOU ARE... MASTERMIND!

THIS IS THE CLIMAX OF MY REVENGE! I KNEW YOU WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RESIST THE CHALLENGE OF DANGER AND THAT YOU WOULD PUT YOURSELF IN MY POWER. NOW YOU WILL PERISH, PROUD EMPEROR! AND I WILL DESTROY YOUR PALACE ABOUT YOU!

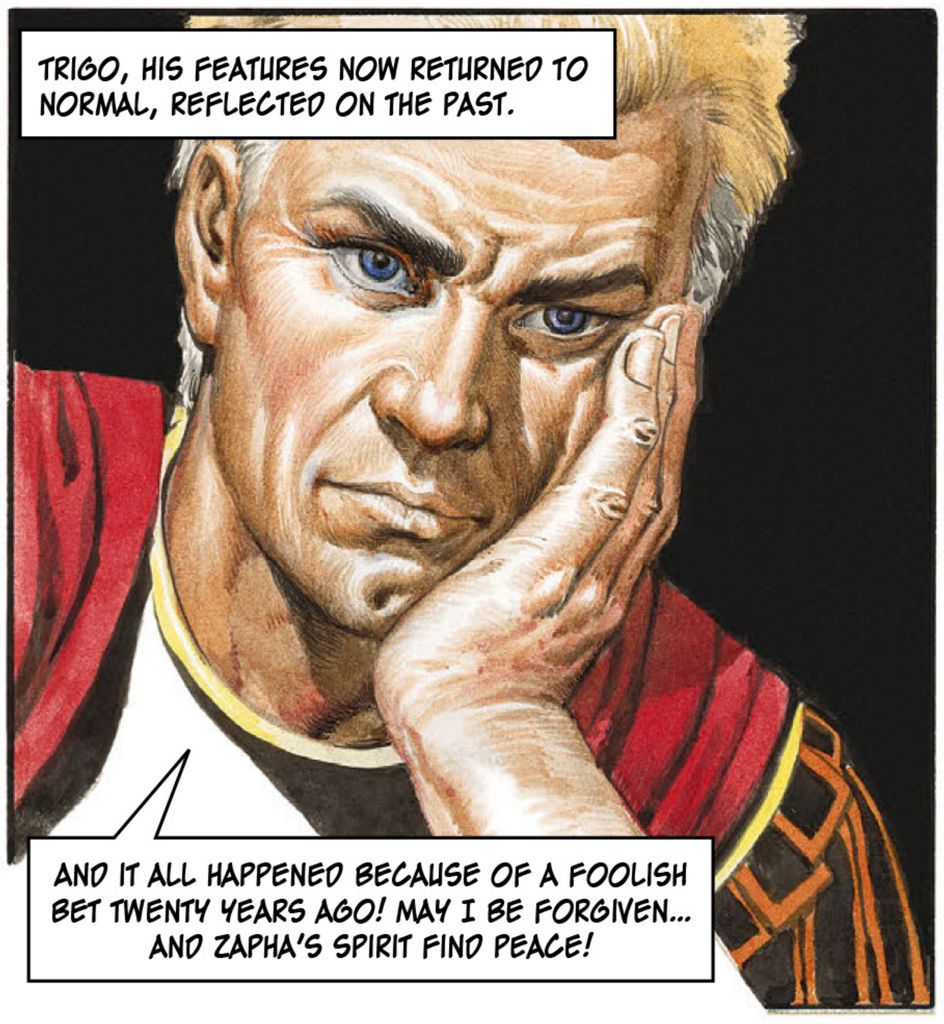
TRIGO KNEW THAT HE WAS DOOMED BUT HE DIVED FEARLESSLY!
I'M NOT DONE FOR YET, ZAPHA!
FOOL!
UUUGH!
DON LAWRENCE.
ZAPHA EXULTED.
MY REVENGE IS ALMOST COMPLETE! I THANK THE STARS FOR THUS WIPING OUT THE INJUSTICE THAT WAS DONE TO ME TWENTY YEARS AGO!
UNTHINKING IN HIS WILD FRENZY, HE TOOK THREE PACES BACK...
NOW TO END FOREVER THE MIGHTY TRIGAN EMPIRE!
THE FOURTH PACE TOOK HIM TO HIS DOOM IN THE COURTYARD BELOW!
EEEEAAGH!
LATER -MUCH LATER- THE PALACE GUARDS RECOVERED FROM THE EFFECTS OF THE GAS AND FOUND THE PROSTRATE FORM OF TRIGO ON THE ROOF.
BY THE STARS! IT'S THE EMPEROR HIMSELF. I RECOGNISE HIS DISGUISE!

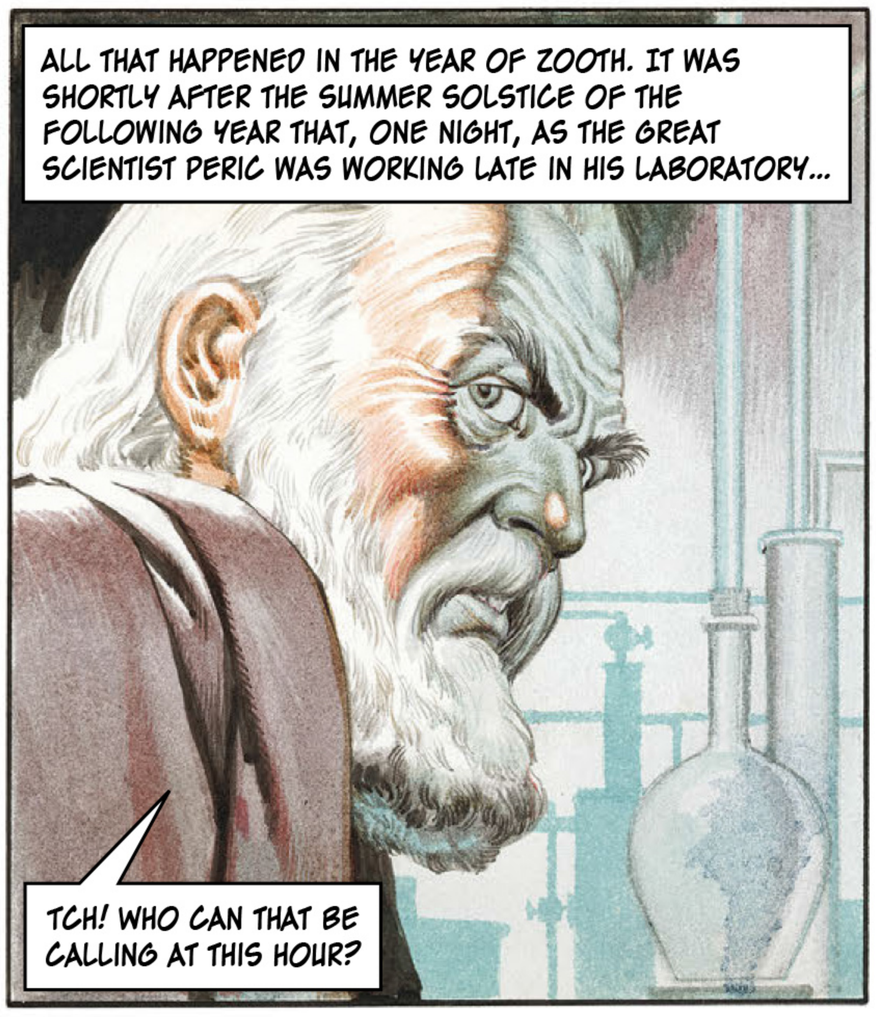
THAT NIGHT, THE EMPEROR HIMSELF LED THE ASSAULT FORCE TO THE LONELY INN IN THE HILLS.
MERCY, I BEG OF YOU! THEY MADE ME WORK FOR THEM!
LEAD US TO THEIR HEADQUARTERS, MISERABLE WRETCH!

BEREFT OF THEIR LEADER, THE WHITE-MASKED RAIDERS WATCHED SILENTLY AS KEREN WAS RELEASED.
THANK THE STARS YOU ARE SAFE, IMPERIAL MAJESTY! THOSE FIENDS KNEW WHO I WAS ALL THE TIME. THEY USED ME TO LURE YOU HERE.
THE REIGN OF TERROR IS OVER, KEREN, AND MASTERMIND IS NO MORE.

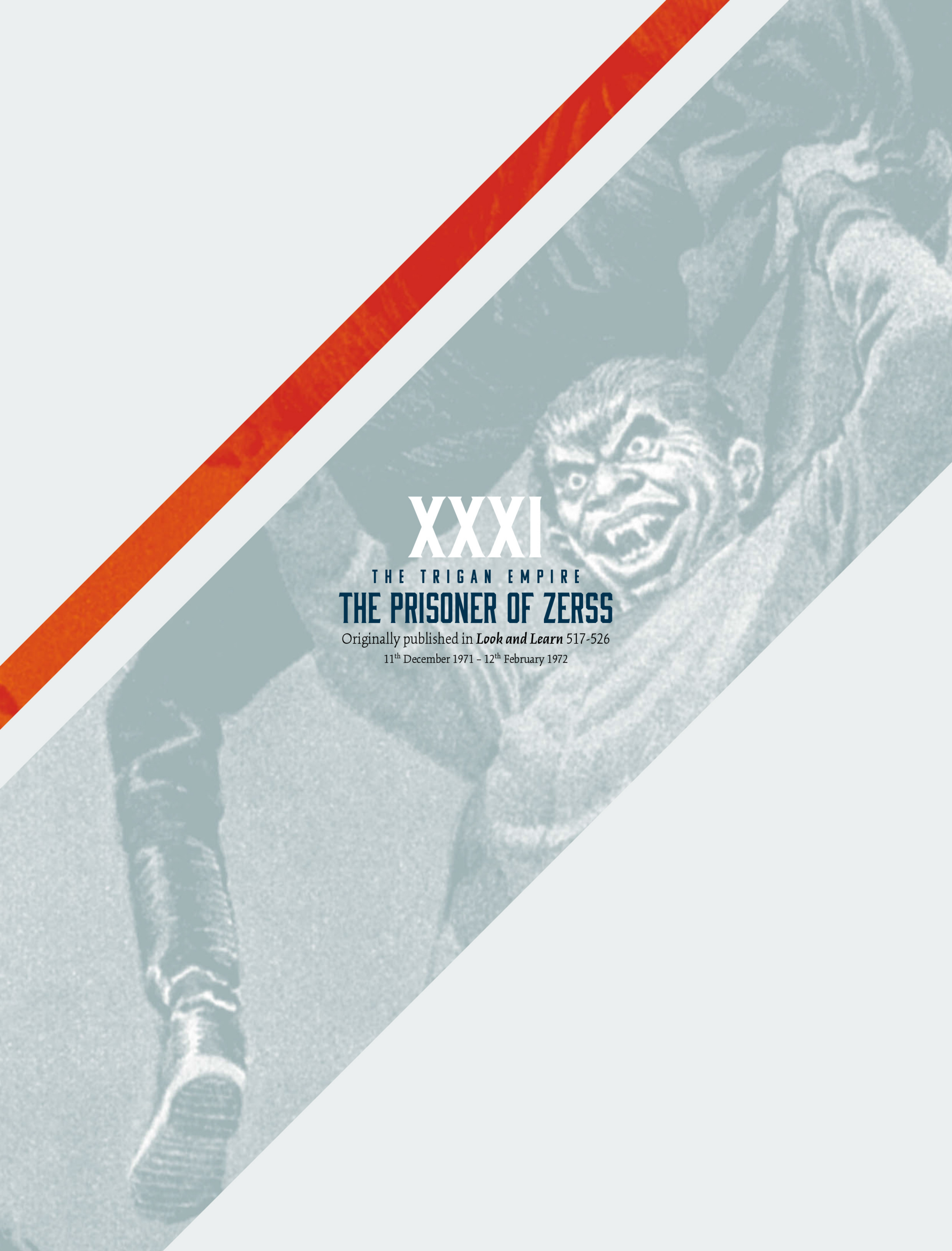

IN ANOTHER CHAMBER THEY FOUND THE CUNNING DEVICE WHICH MASTERMIND HAD USED TO ADDRESS HIS MINIONS.
ZAPHA PROJECTED THAT IMAGE ON THE THRONE IN THE CHAMBER BEYOND.
TO THINK THAT STRONG MEN TREMBLED AT THE SIGHT OF IT!

NOT FOR TWELVE LUNAR MONTHS WAS ORDER COMPLETELY RESTORED TO THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. JANNO WAS THE LAST TO RECOVER.
AT LAST WE CAN FORGET, UNCLE!
YES, JANNO. IT'S ALL OVER. BUT WE MUST NEVER FORGET HOW CLOSE THE EMPIRE CAME TO DESTRUCTION.


TRIGO, HIS FEATURES NOW RETURNED TO NORMAL, REFLECTED ON THE PAST.
AND IT ALL HAPPENED BECAUSE OF A FOOLISH BET TWENTY YEARS AGO! MAY I BE FORGIVEN... AND ZAPHA'S SPIRIT FIND PEACE!


ALL THAT HAPPENED IN THE YEAR OF ZOOTH. IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER THE SUMMER SOLSTICE OF THE FOLLOWING YEAR THAT, ONE NIGHT, AS THE GREAT SCIENTIST PERIC WAS WORKING LATE IN HIS LABORATORY...
TCH! WHO CAN THAT BE CALLING AT THIS HOUR?

...A KNOCK SOUNDED ON HIS DOOR...



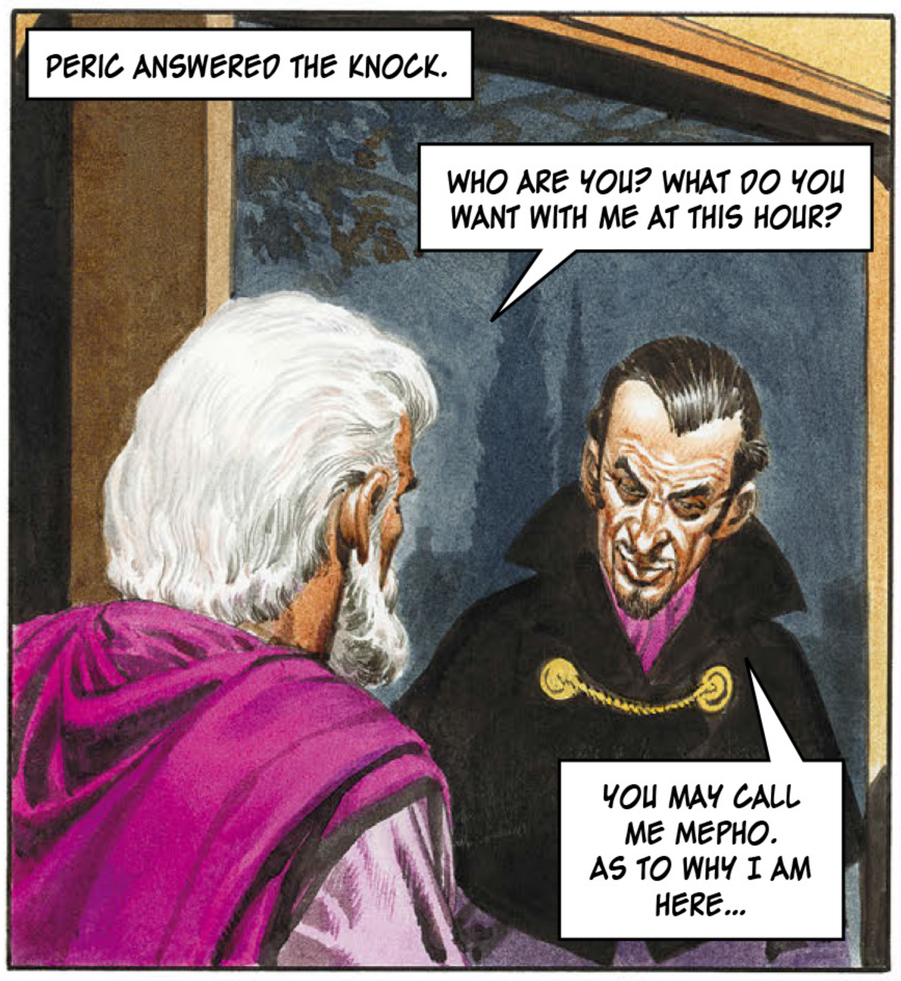
XXXI

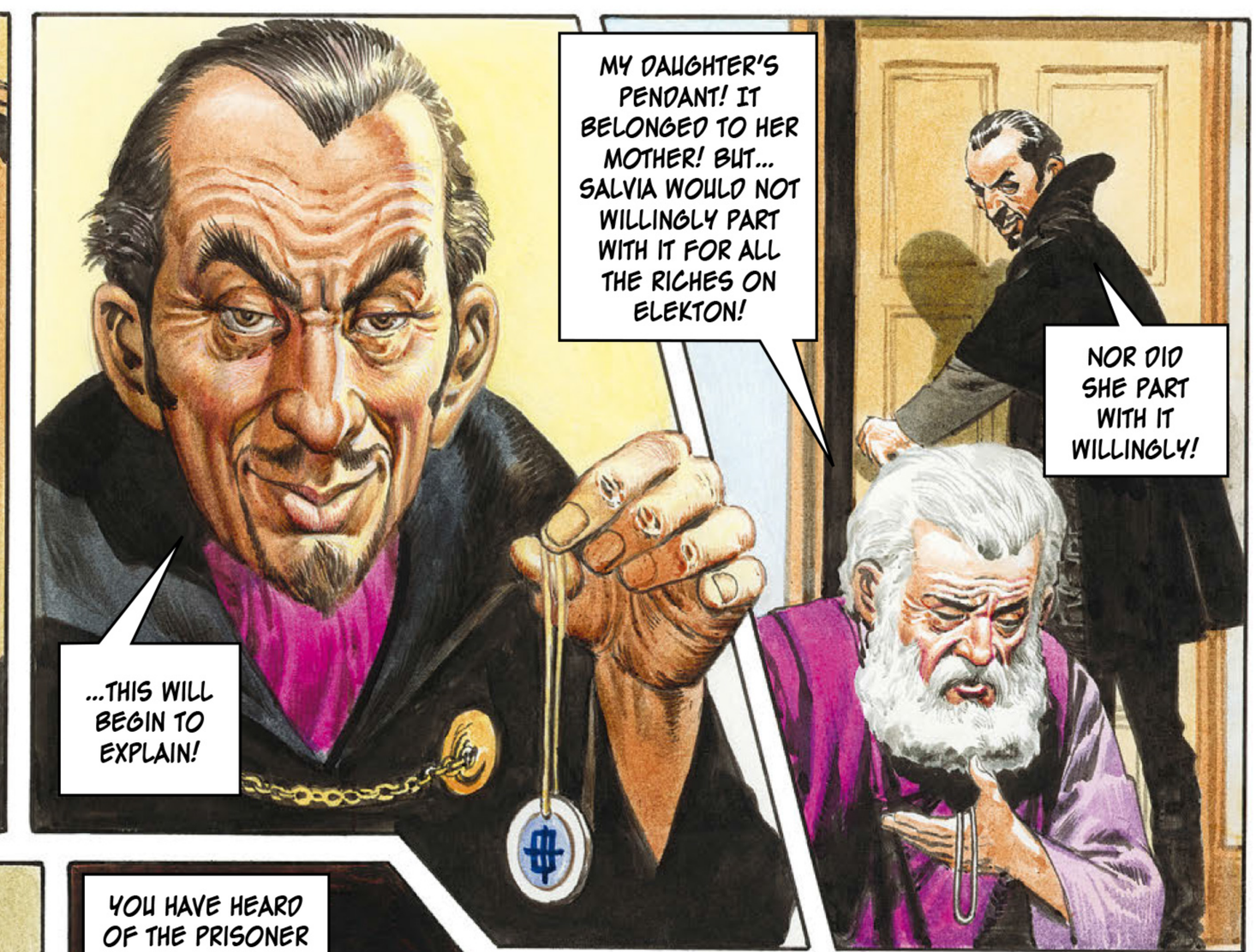
THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

THE PRISONER OF ZERSS

Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 517-526

11th December 1971 – 12th February 1972

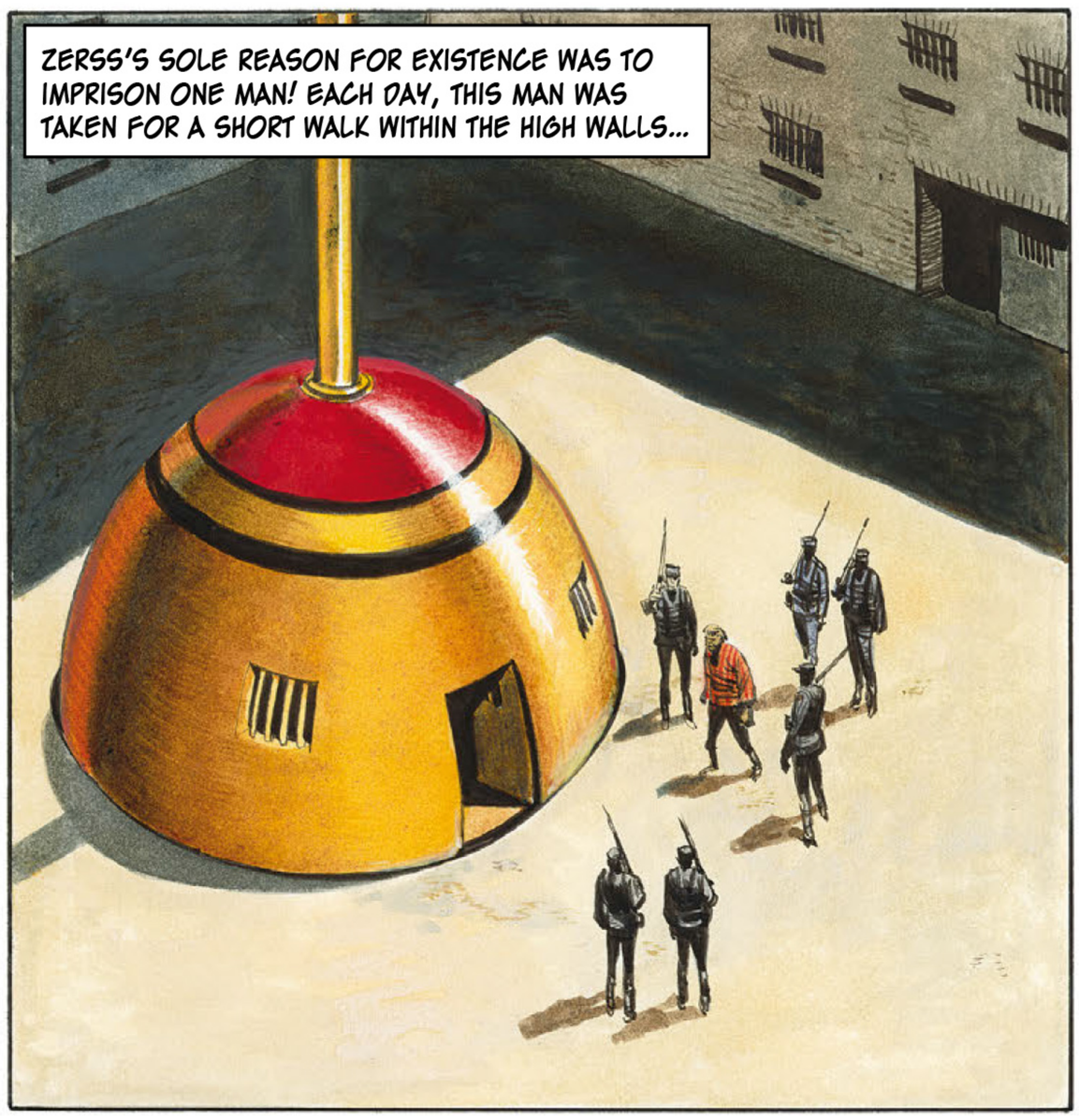

PERIC ANSWERED THE KNOCK.
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME AT THIS HOUR?
YOU MAY CALL ME MEPHO. AS TO WHY I AM HERE...

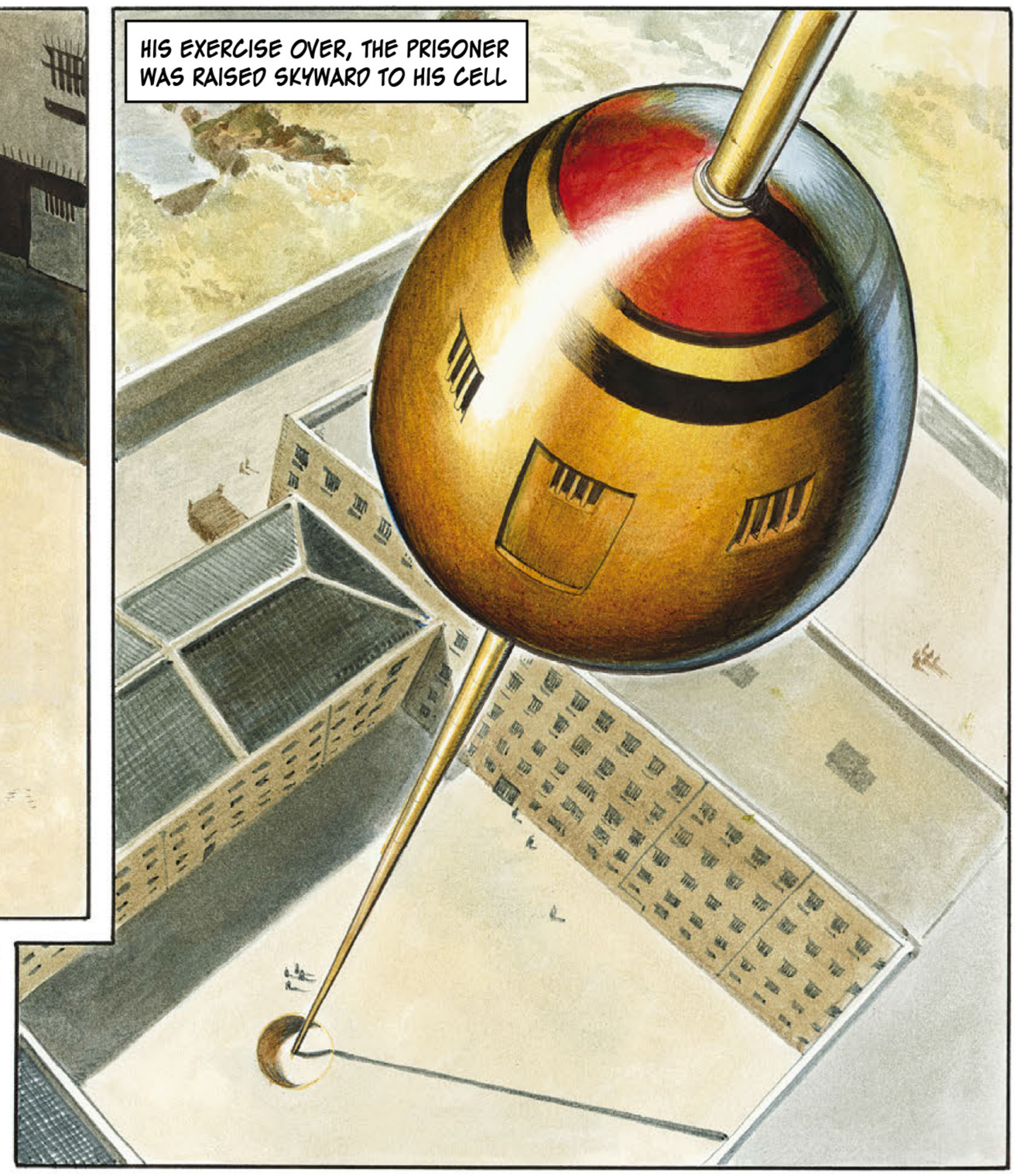

...THIS WILL BEGIN TO EXPLAIN!
MY DAUGHTER'S PENDANT! IT BELONGED TO HER MOTHER! BUT... SALVIA WOULD NOT WILLINGLY PART WITH IT FOR ALL THE RICHES ON ELEKTON!
NOR DID SHE PART WITH IT WILLINGLY!

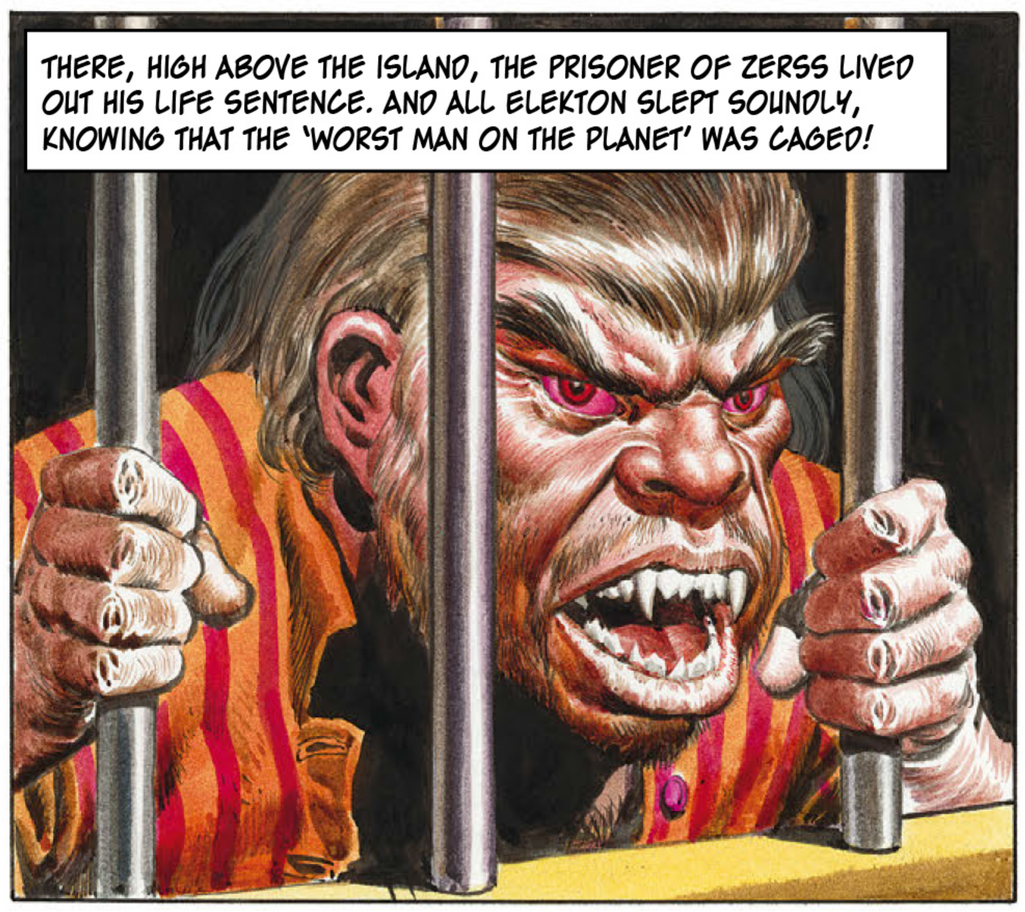
WHERE IS SHE? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HER, YOU FIEND?
SALVIA IS IN GOOD HANDS, I PROMISE YOU. AND SHE WILL BE RETURNED SAFELY TO YOU. JUST AS SOON AS YOU HAVE PERFORMED A CERTAIN TASK FOR ME AND MY ASSOCIATES.

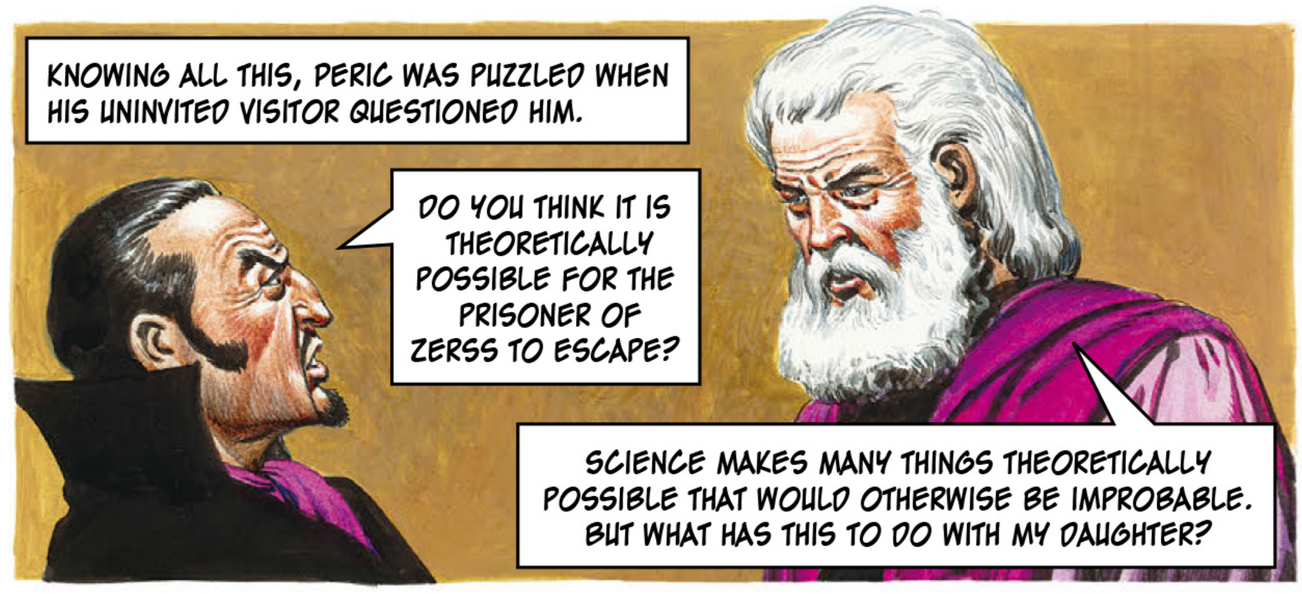
YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE PRISONER OF ZERSS?
WHO HAS NOT? FOR PITY'S SAKE, COME TO THE POINT!

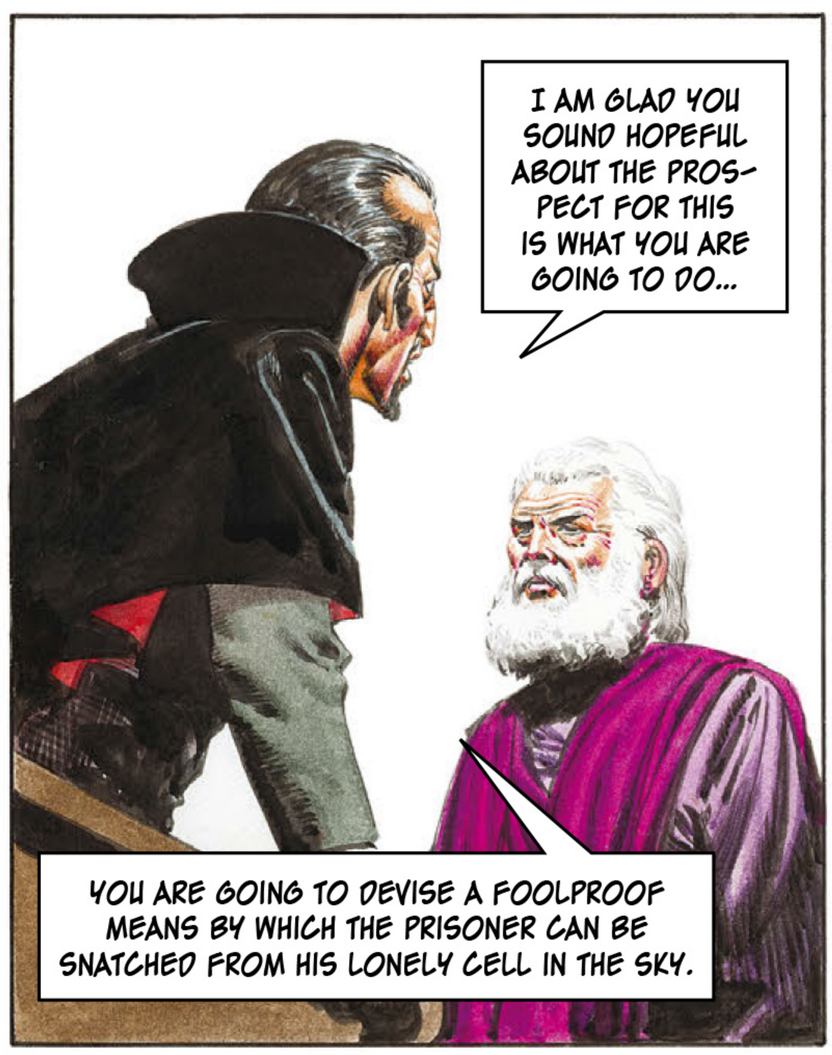
IT SHOULD BE EXPLAINED TO THE EARTHLY READER THAT ZERSS WAS A FEARSOME PRISON ISLAND IN THE MONSTER-INFESTED SEA OF ZERSS, A PLACE OF CAPTIVITY FROM WHICH THERE IS NO ESCAPE.


ZERSS'S SOLE REASON FOR EXISTENCE WAS TO IMPRISON ONE MAN! EACH DAY, THIS MAN WAS TAKEN FOR A SHORT WALK WITHIN THE HIGH WALLS...


HIS EXERCISE OVER, THE PRISONER WAS RAISED SKYWARD TO HIS CELL

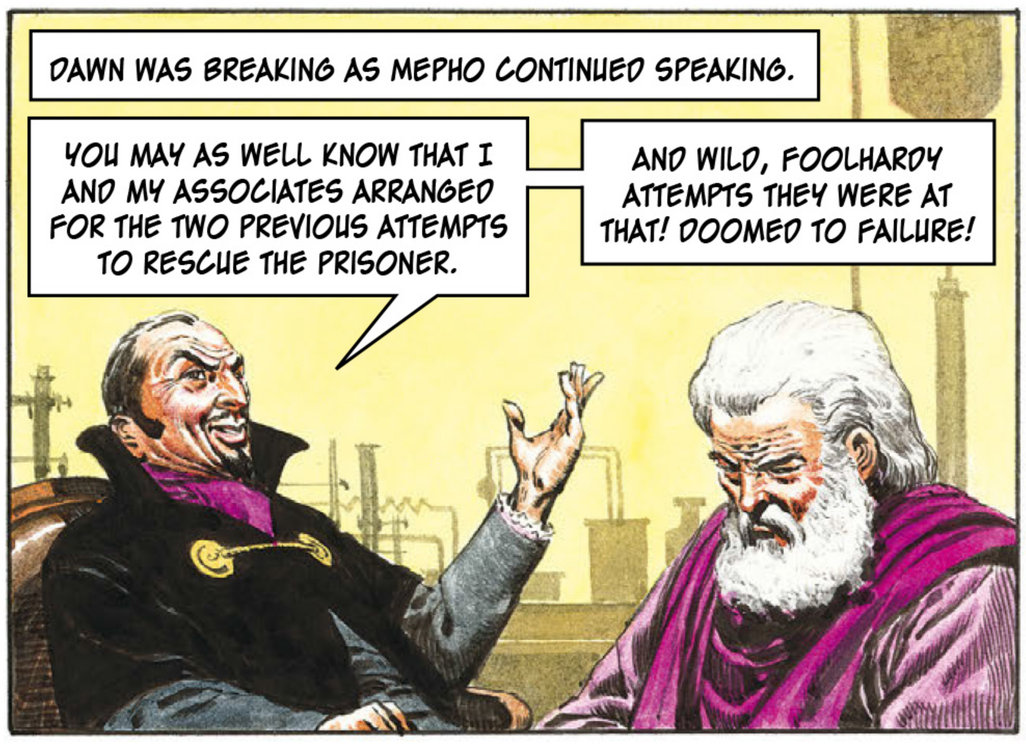

THERE, HIGH ABOVE THE ISLAND, THE PRISONER OF ZERSS LIVED OUT HIS LIFE SENTENCE. AND ALL ELEKTON SLEPT SOUNDLY, KNOWING THAT THE 'WORST MAN ON THE PLANET' WAS CAGED!

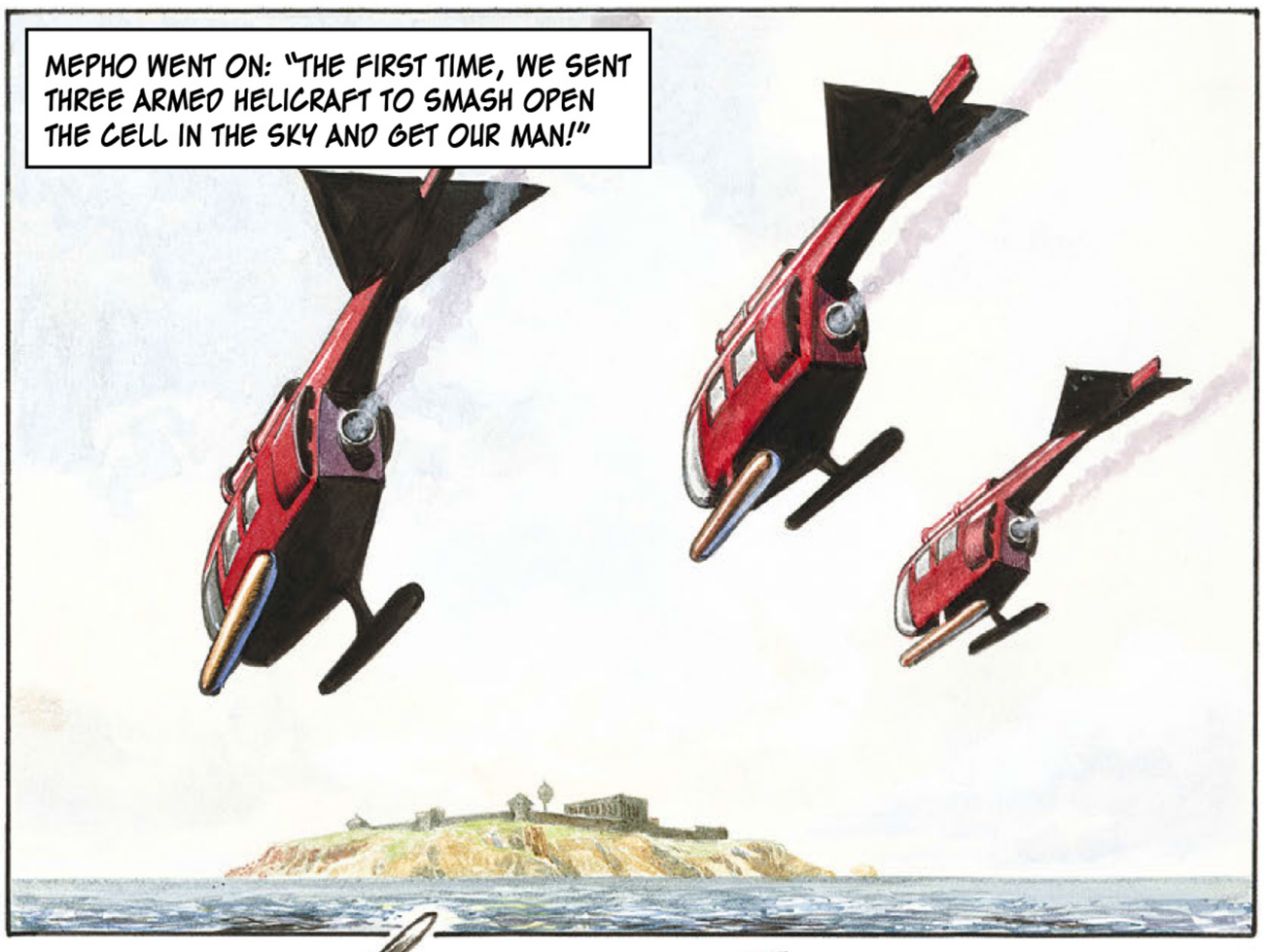

KNOWING ALL THIS, PERIC WAS PUZZLED WHEN HIS UNINVITED VISITOR QUESTIONED HIM.
DO YOU THINK IT IS THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE FOR THE PRISONER OF ZERSS TO ESCAPE?
SCIENCE MAKES MANY THINGS THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE IMPROBABLE. BUT WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH MY DAUGHTER?


I AM GLAD YOU SOUND HOPEFUL ABOUT THE PROSPECT FOR THIS IS WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO DO...
YOU ARE GOING TO DEVISE A FOOLPROOF MEANS BY WHICH THE PRISONER CAN BE SNATCHED FROM HIS LONELY CELL IN THE SKY.

NEVER! HOW COULD I BE PARTY TO TURNING THAT BEAST LOOSE UPON THE PLANET? GIVE ME BACK MY DAUGHTER AND TAKE YOUR INSANE PROPOSAL ELSEWHERE!
I WILL GIVE YOU BACK YOUR DAUGHTER. AT DAWN SHE WILL ARRIVE ON YOUR DOORSTEP – DROPPED THERE BY AN AIRCRAFT!

PERIC KNEW HE WAS BEATEN.
NO! SPARE HER! I WILL DO AS YOU SAY!
THERE. I KNEW YOU WERE THE SORT OF INTELLIGENT GENTLEMAN WITH WHOM I COULD DO BUSINESS!

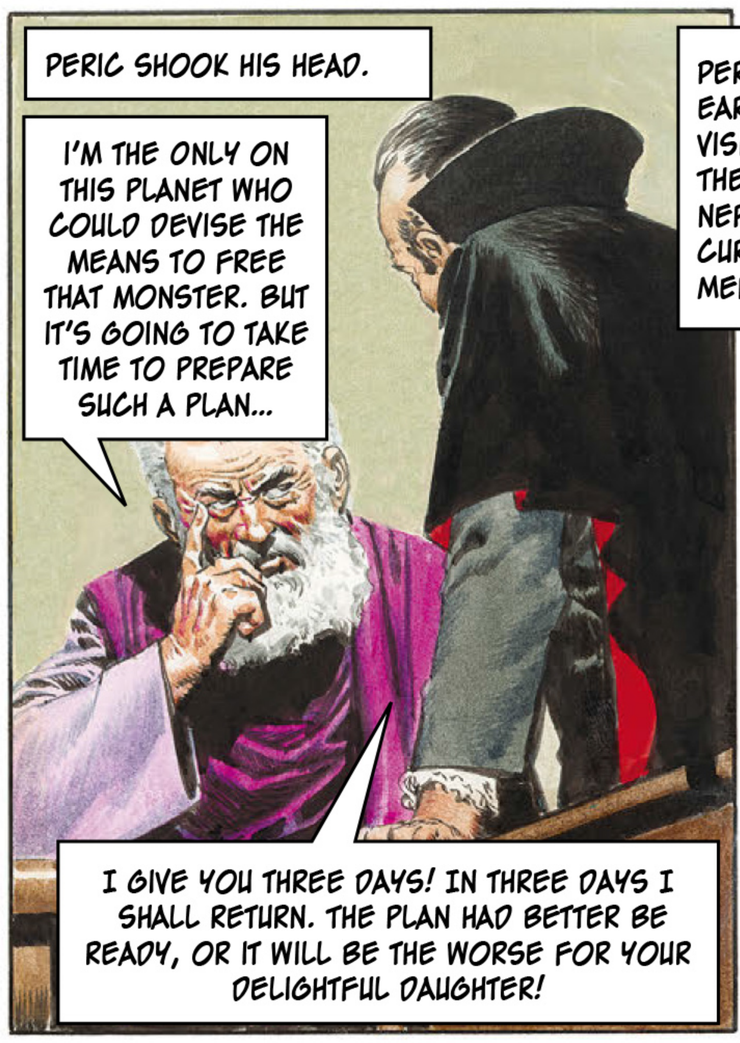


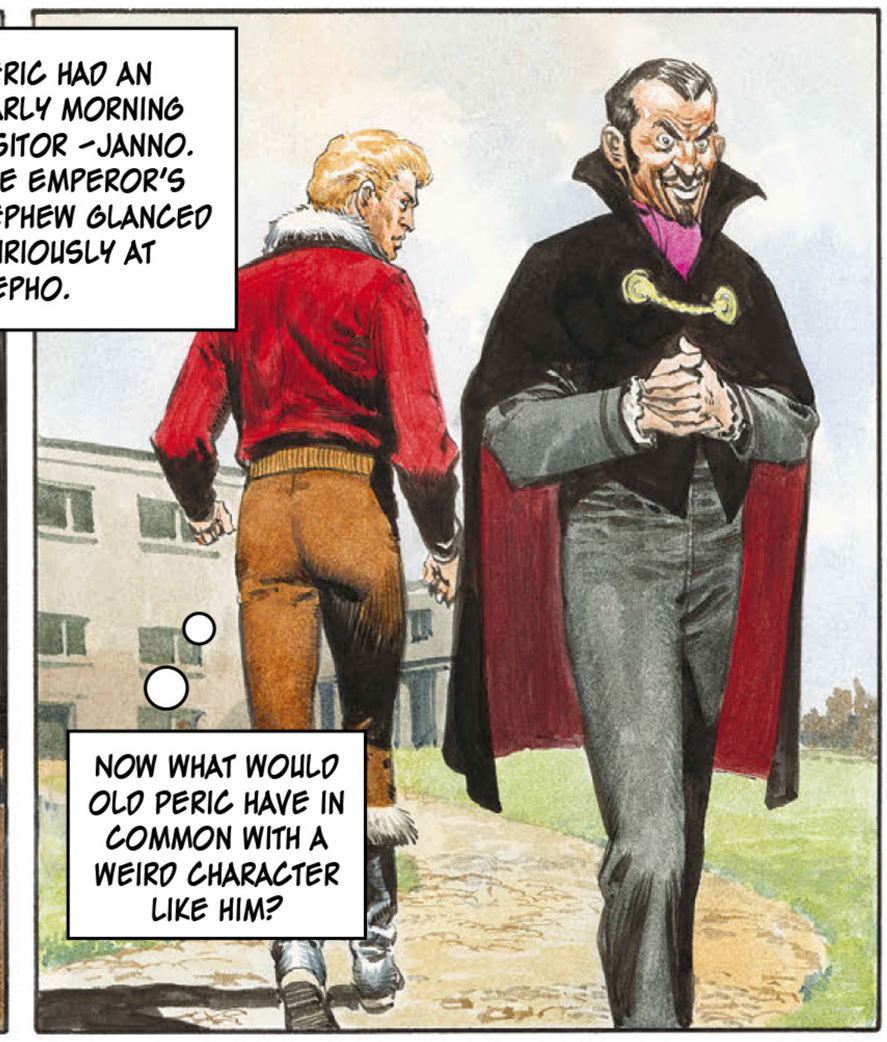


"THEY WERE DESTROYED BY THE SECRET AIR DEFENCES OF THE PRISON ISLAND!"

"ON THE SECOND ATTEMPT," CONTINUED MEPHO, "WE SENT IN A TRIO OF HIGH SPEED ASSAULT LAUNCHES TO TAKE THE PRISON ISLAND BY STORM!"

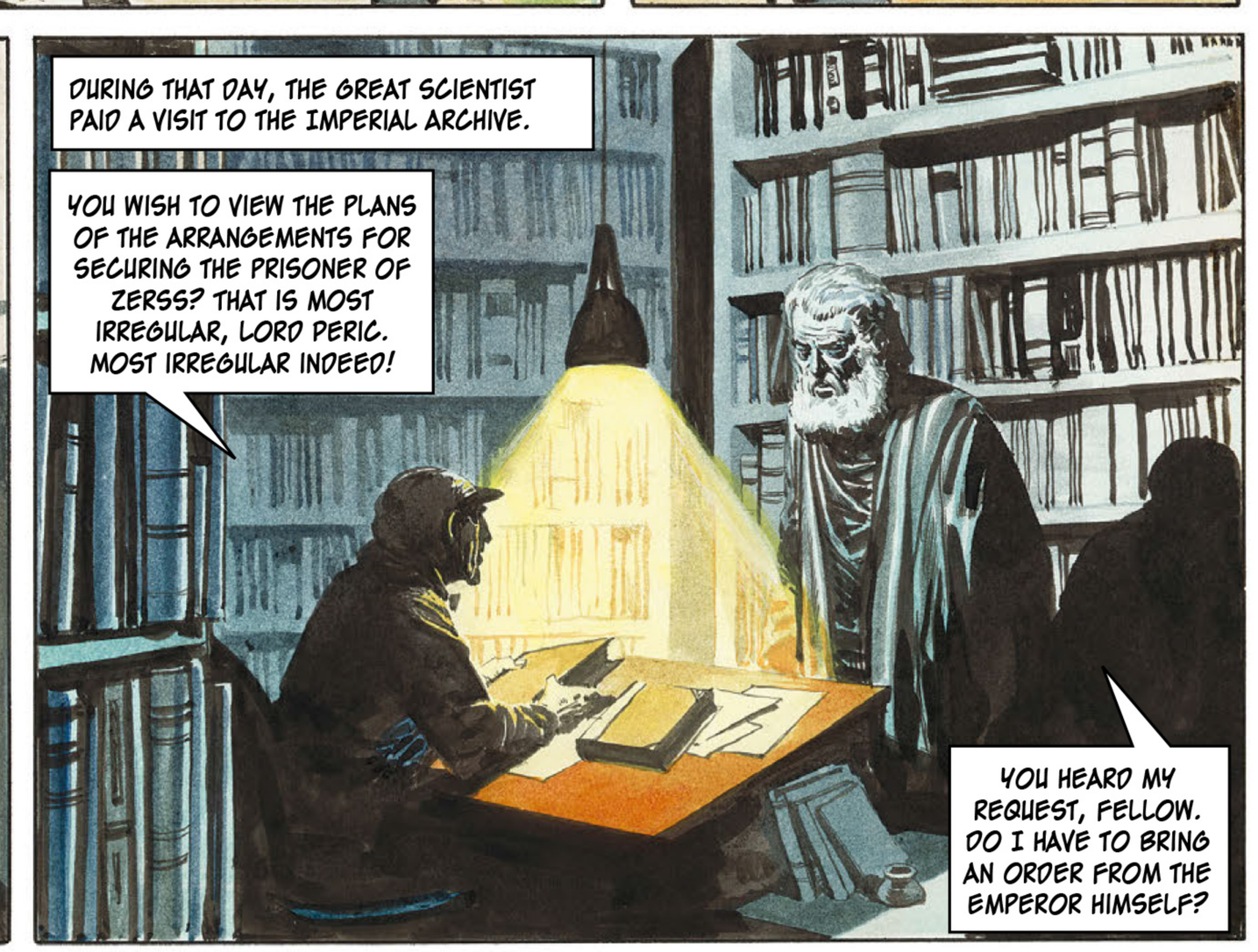
"THAT ALSO MET WITH DISASTER!"


PERIC SHOOK HIS HEAD.
I'M THE ONLY ON THIS PLANET WHO COULD DEVISE THE MEANS TO FREE THAT MONSTER. BUT IT'S GOING TO TAKE TIME TO PREPARE SUCH A PLAN...
I GIVE YOU THREE DAYS! IN THREE DAYS I SHALL RETURN. THE PLAN HAD BETTER BE READY, OR IT WILL BE THE WORSE FOR YOUR DELIGHTFUL DAUGHTER!

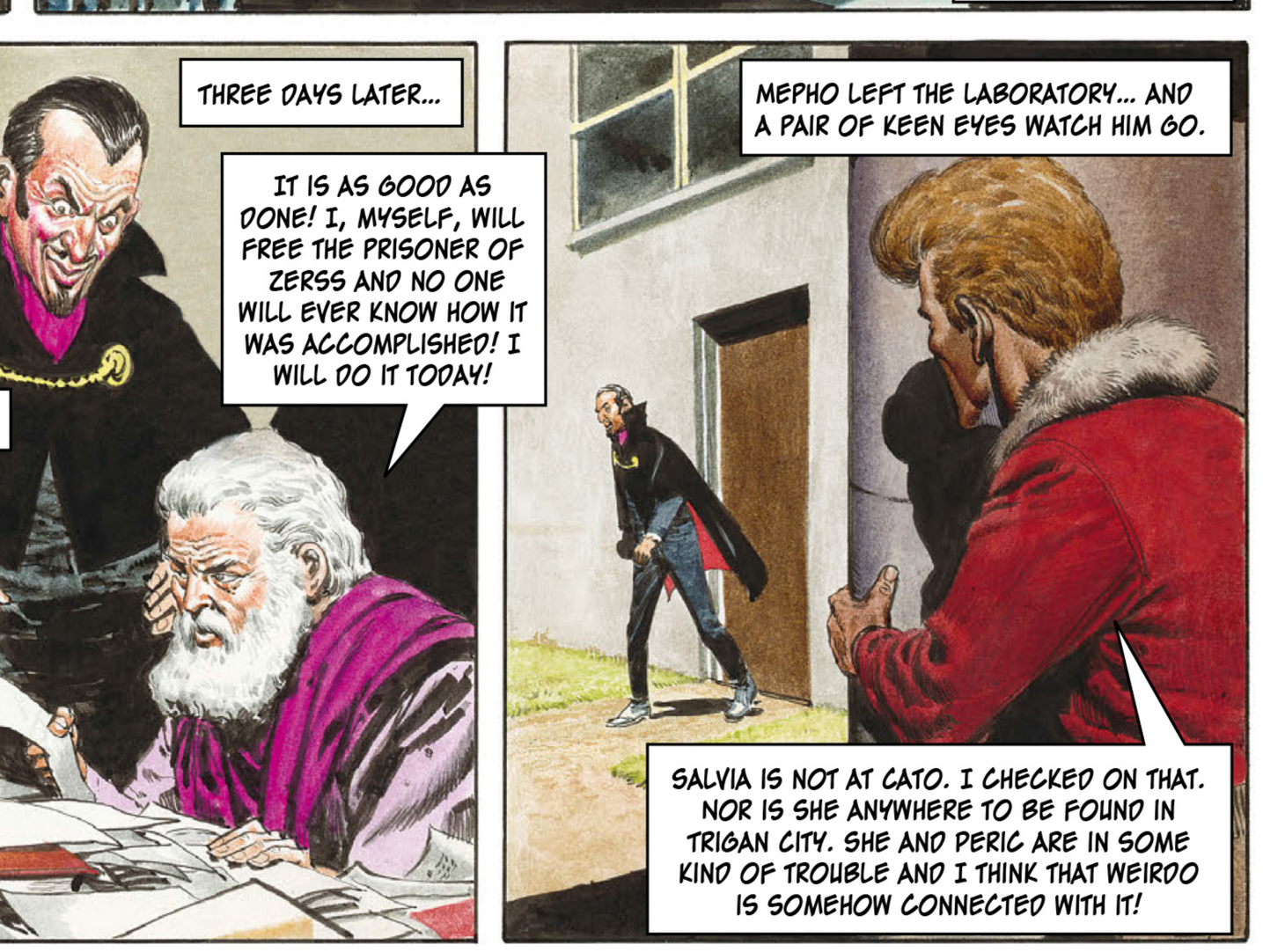

PERIC HAD AN EARLY MORNING VISITOR –JANNO. THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW GLANCED CURIOUSLY AT MEPHO.
NOW WHAT WOULD OLD PERIC HAVE IN COMMON WITH A WEIRD CHARACTER LIKE HIM?

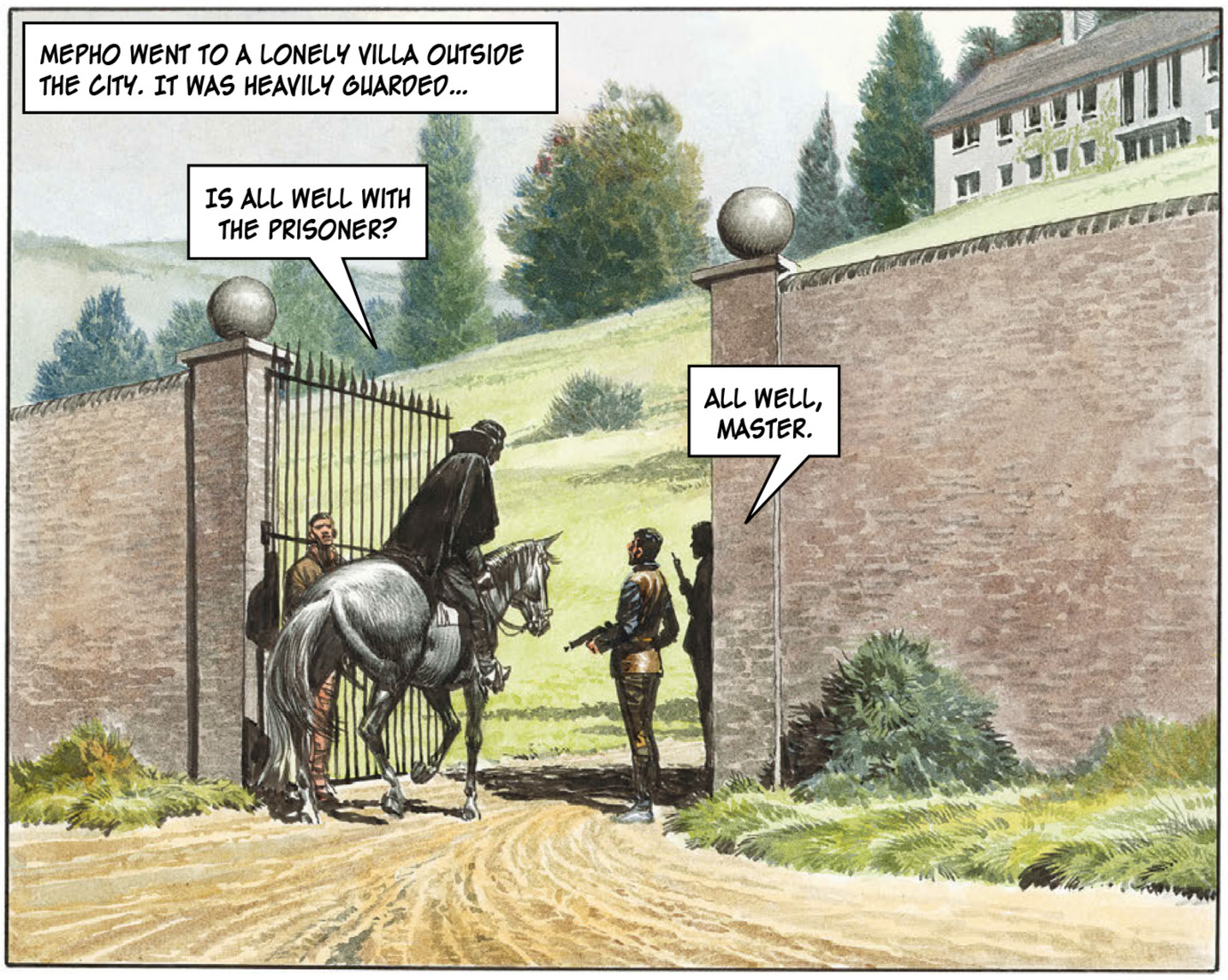
THE REASON FOR HIS YOUNG FRIEND'S VISIT SENT A SPASM OF TERROR THROUGH PERIC'S BODY.
I CALLED ROUND AT YOUR VILLA TO SEE IF SALVIA WANTED TO GO SWIMMING BUT SHE WAS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND.
AH! WELL... THE FACT IS, SHE WENT YESTERDAY TO VISIT HER AUNT IN CATO.

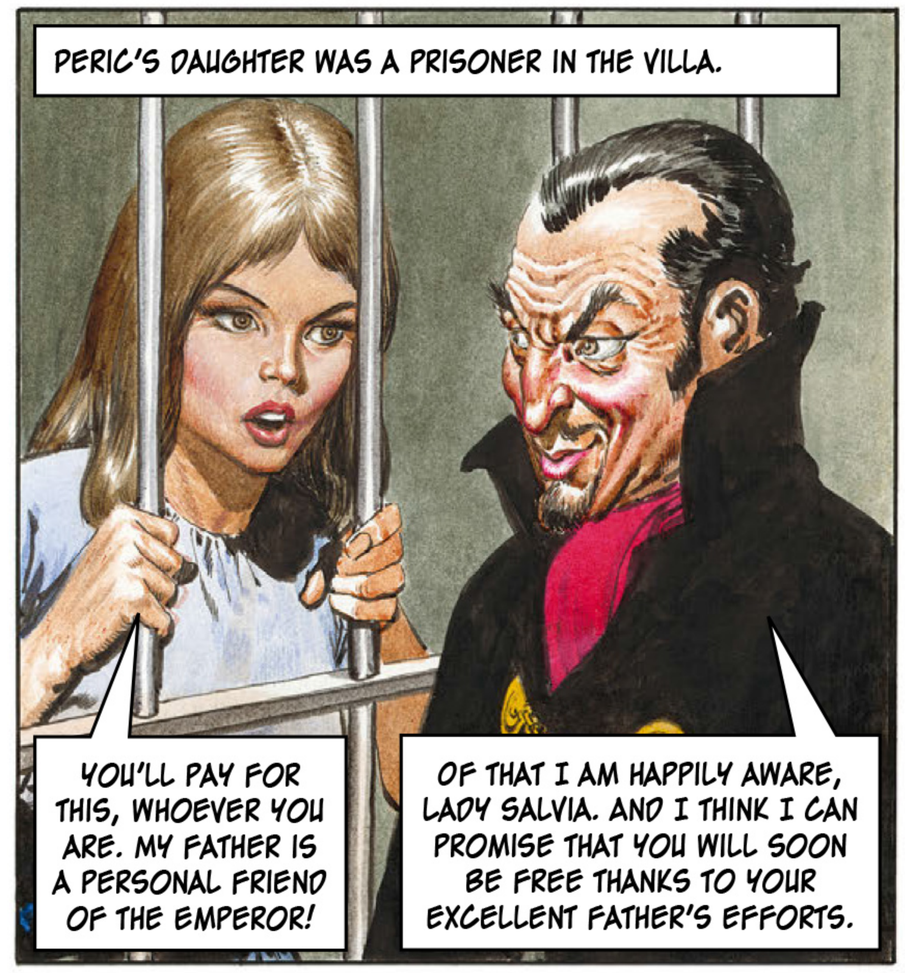
JANNO LEFT, PUZZLED AND WORRIED.
WHY IS PERIC LYING TO ME? I SAW SALVIA LAST NIGHT AND THERE WAS NO MENTION OF HER GOING TO CATO!


DURING THAT DAY, THE GREAT SCIENTIST PAID A VISIT TO THE IMPERIAL ARCHIVE.
YOU WISH TO VIEW THE PLANS OF THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR SECURING THE PRISONER OF ZERSS? THAT IS MOST IRREGULAR, LORD PERIC. MOST IRREGULAR INDEED!
YOU HEARD MY REQUEST, FELLOW. DO I HAVE TO BRING AN ORDER FROM THE EMPEROR HIMSELF?

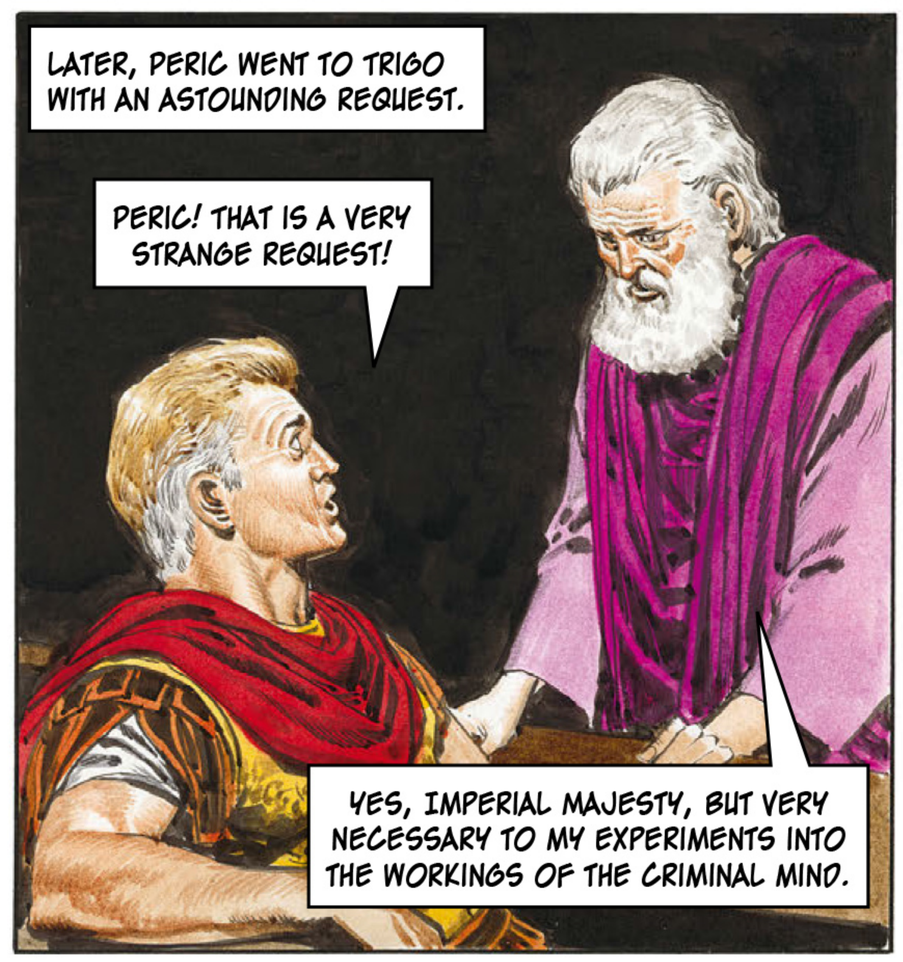
HE LEARNED ALL HE NEEDED TO KNOW.
THERE IS NOTHING THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO THE SCIENTIFIC MIND! I SEE A WAY TO RELEASE THAT MONSTER UPON THE PLANET... AND SAVE MY DAUGHTER!

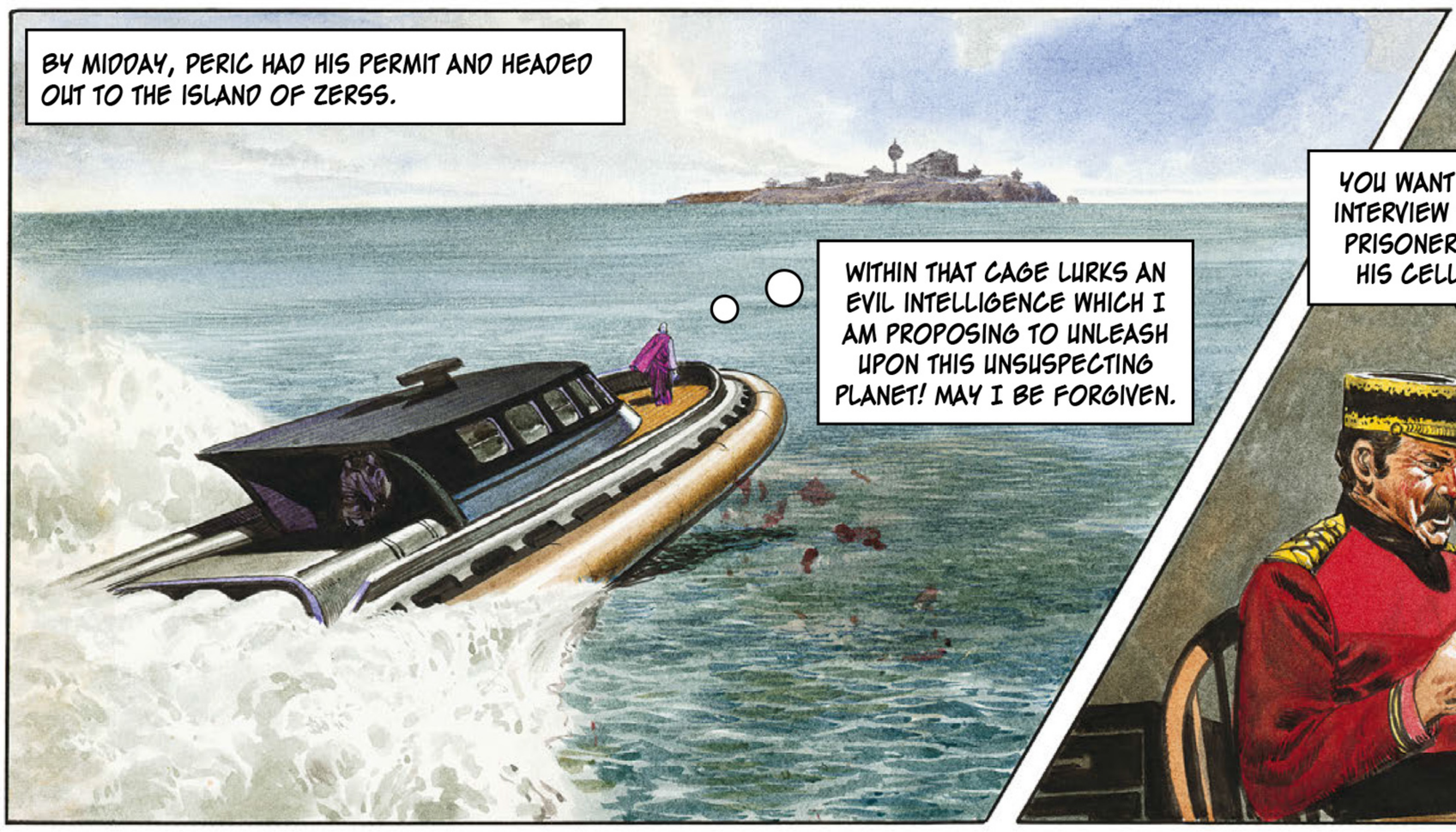

THREE DAYS LATER...
WELL?
IT IS AS GOOD AS DONE! I, MYSELF, WILL FREE THE PRISONER OF ZERSS AND NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW HOW IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED! I WILL DO IT TODAY!
MEPHO LEFT THE LABORATORY... AND A PAIR OF KEEN EYES WATCH HIM GO.
SALVIA IS NOT AT CATO. I CHECKED ON THAT. NOR IS SHE ANYWHERE TO BE FOUND IN TRIGAN CITY. SHE AND PERIC ARE IN SOME KIND OF TROUBLE AND I THINK THAT WEIRDO IS SOMEHOW CONNECTED WITH IT!

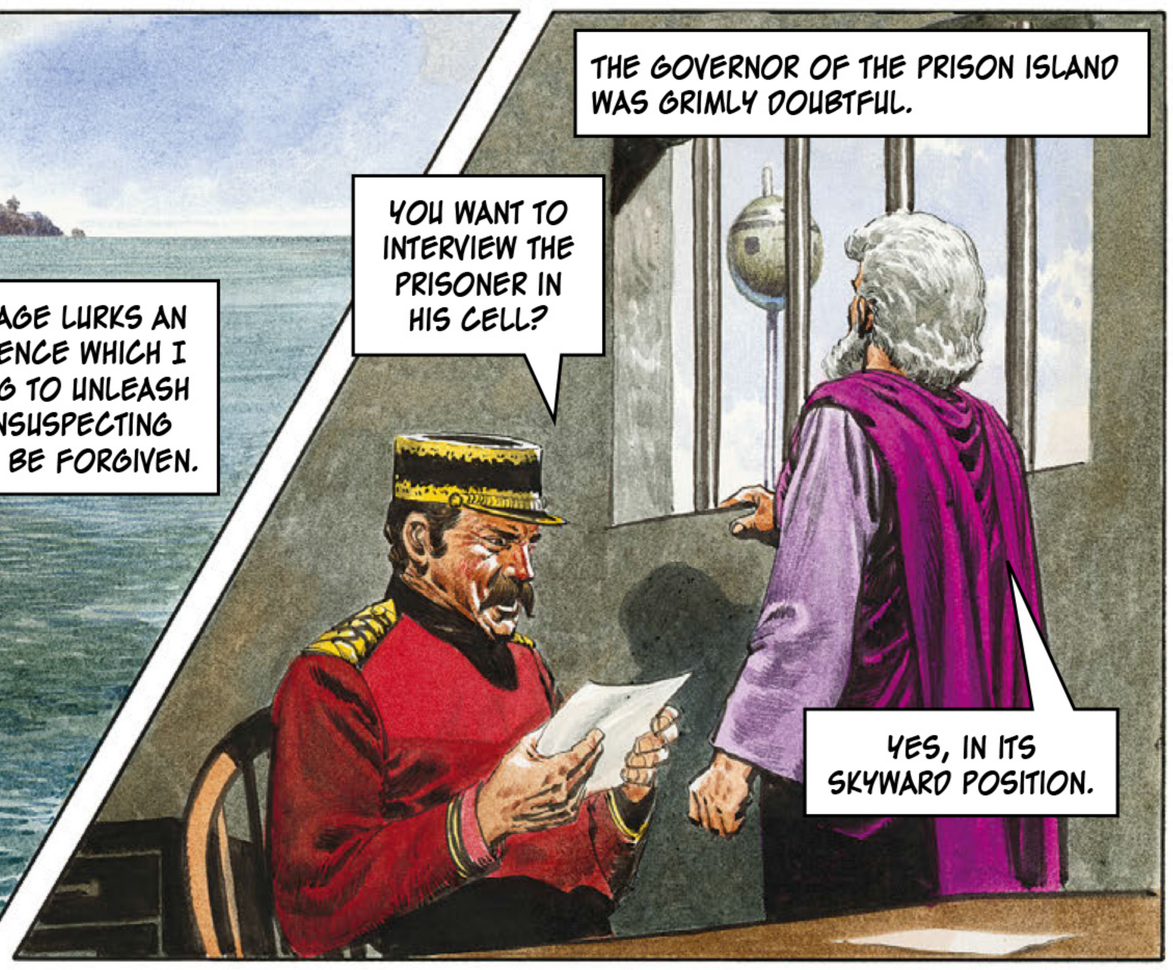

MEPHO WENT TO A LONELY VILLA OUTSIDE THE CITY. IT WAS HEAVILY GUARDED...
IS ALL WELL WITH THE PRISONER?
ALL WELL, MASTER.

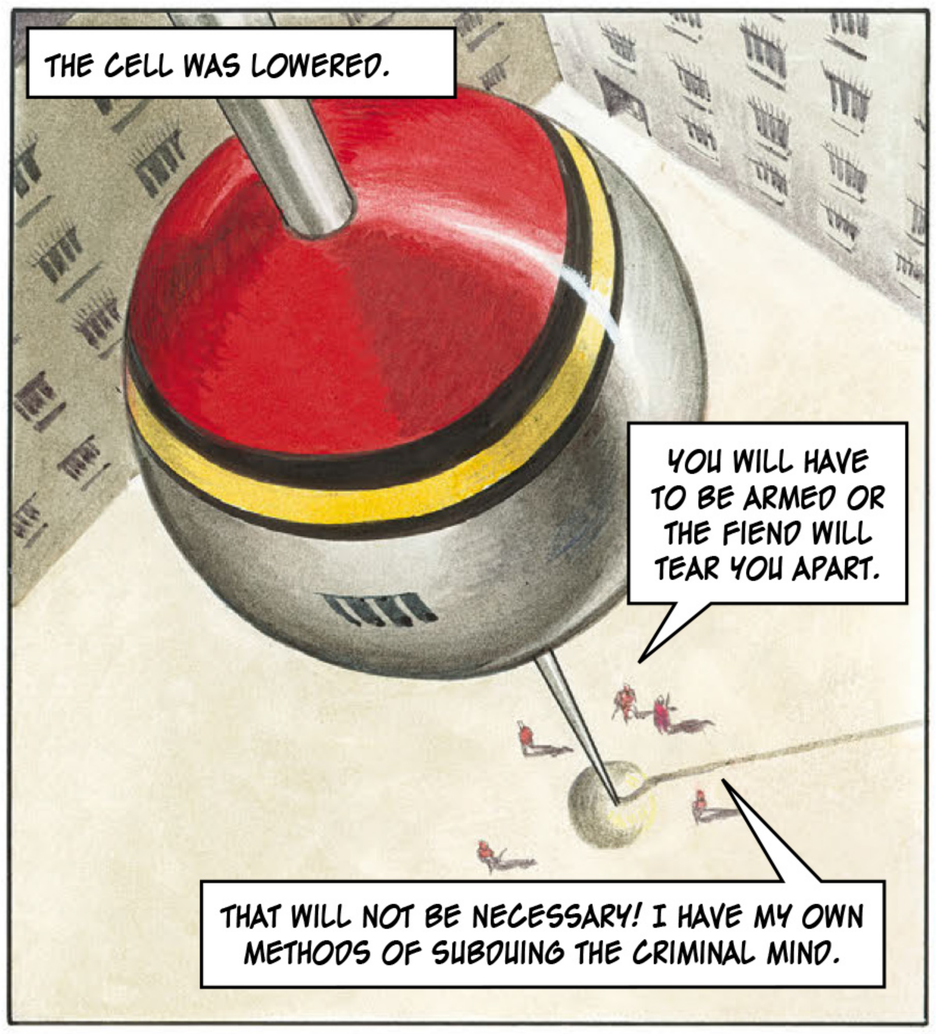

PERIC'S DAUGHTER WAS A PRISONER IN THE VILLA.
YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS, WHOEVER YOU ARE. MY FATHER IS A PERSONAL FRIEND OF THE EMPEROR!
OF THAT I AM HAPPILY AWARE, LADY SALVIA. AND I THINK I CAN PROMISE THAT YOU WILL SOON BE FREE THANKS TO YOUR EXCELLENT FATHER'S EFFORTS.

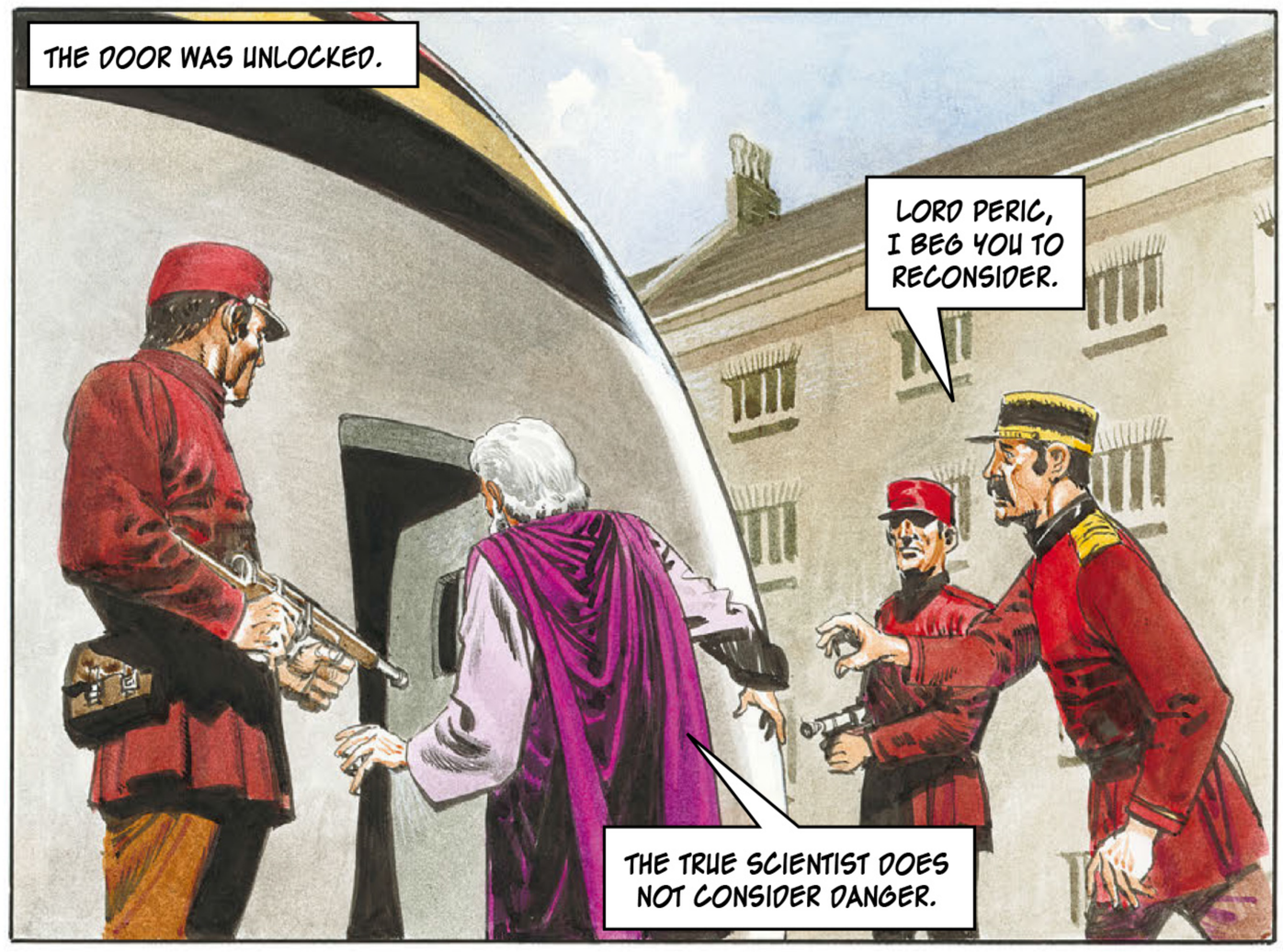
JANNO HAD FOLLOWED THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER TO HIS LAIR.
I THINK I WILL PAY A VISIT TO THAT PLACE TONIGHT.

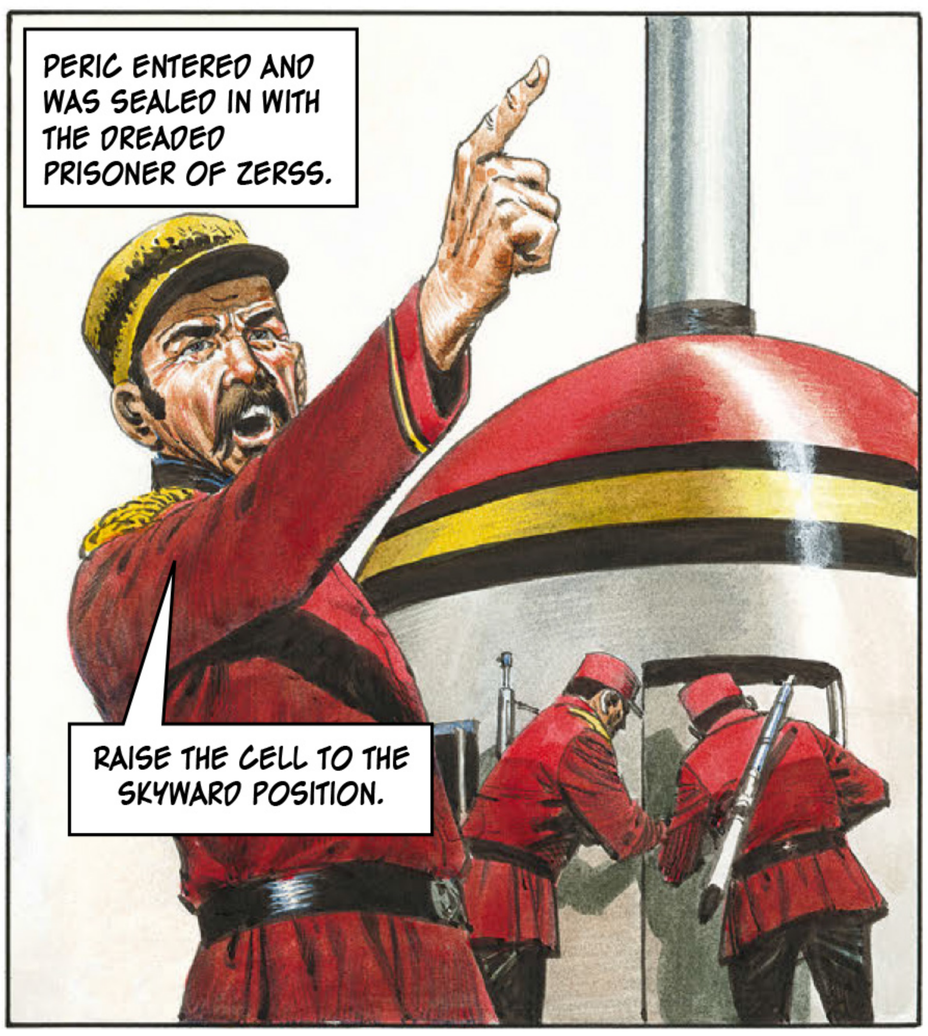

LATER, PERIC WENT TO TRIGO WITH AN ASTOUNDING REQUEST.
PERIC! THAT IS A VERY STRANGE REQUEST!
YES, IMPERIAL MAJESTY, BUT VERY NECESSARY TO MY EXPERIMENTS INTO THE WORKINGS OF THE CRIMINAL MIND.

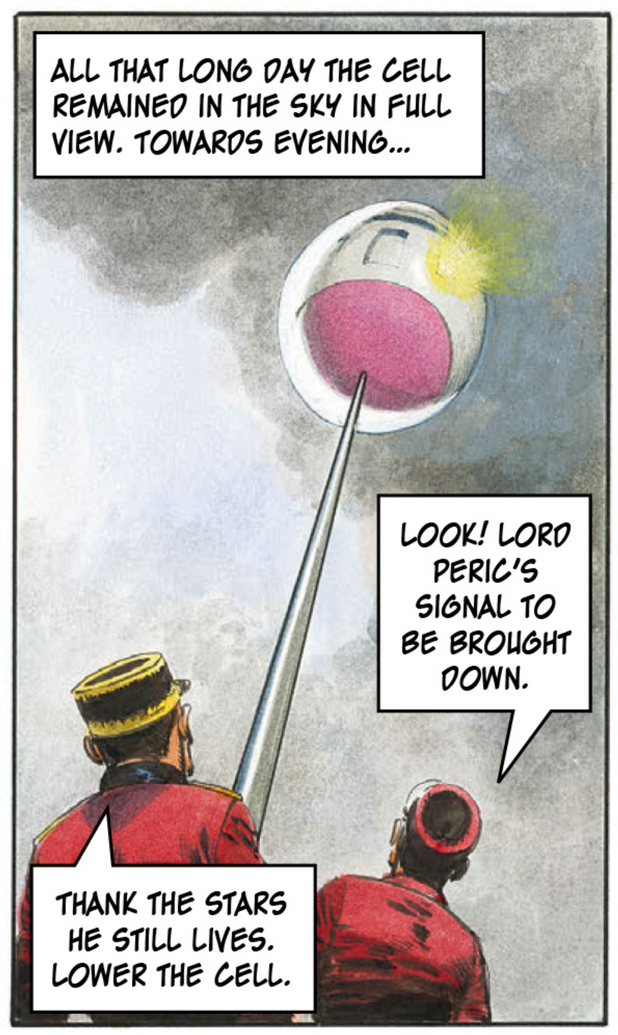

BY MIDDAY, PERIC HAD HIS PERMIT AND HEADED OUT TO THE ISLAND OF ZERSS.
WITHIN THAT CAGE LURKS AN EVIL INTELLIGENCE WHICH I AM PROPOSING TO UNLEASH UPON THIS UNSUSPECTING PLANET! MAY I BE FORGIVEN.


THE GOVERNOR OF THE PRISON ISLAND WAS GRIMLY DOUBTFUL.
YOU WANT TO INTERVIEW THE PRISONER IN HIS CELL?
YES, IN ITS SKYWARD POSITION.

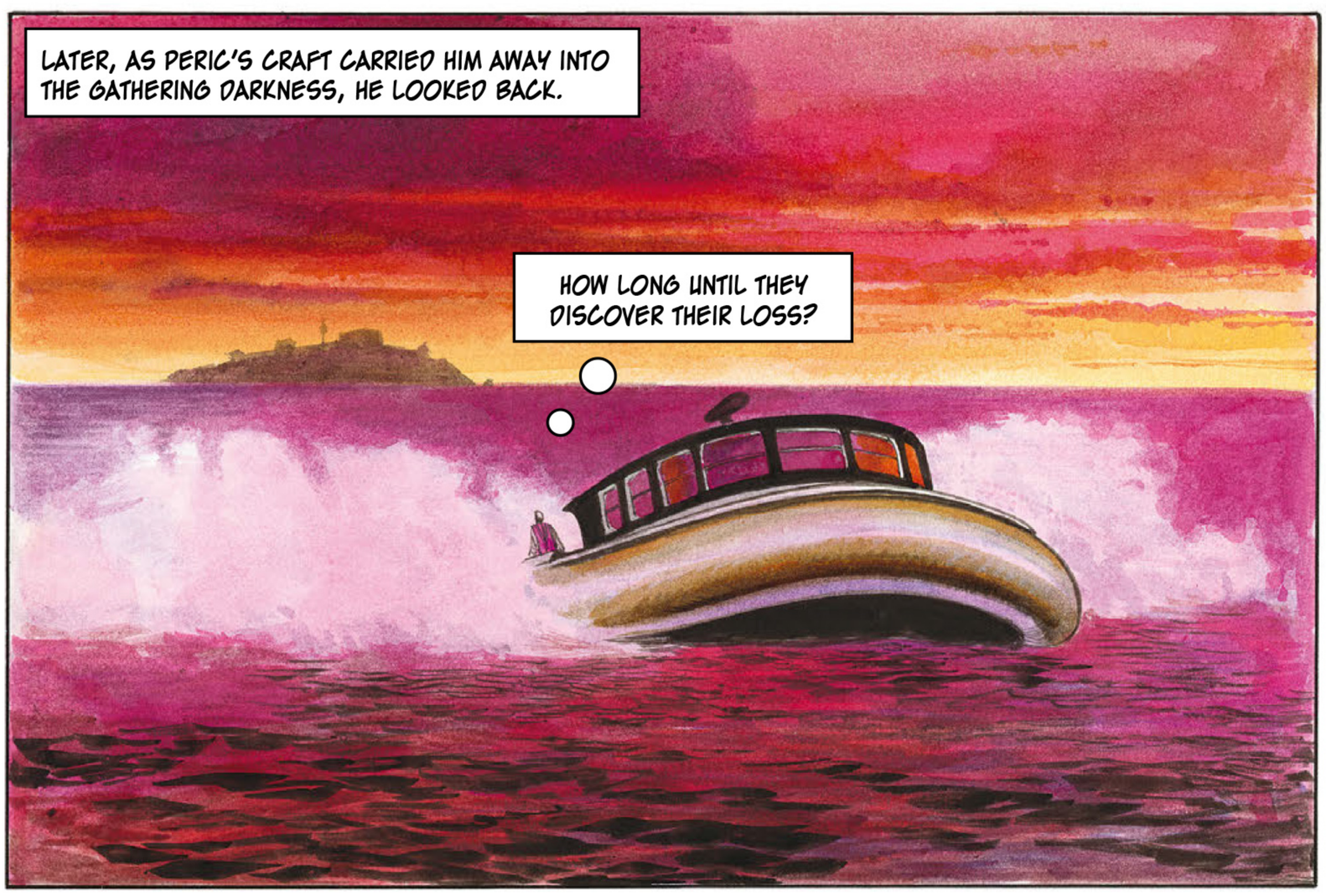

THE CELL WAS LOWERED.
YOU WILL HAVE TO BE ARMED OR THE FIEND WILL TEAR YOU APART.
THAT WILL NOT BE NECESSARY! I HAVE MY OWN METHODS OF SUBDUING THE CRIMINAL MIND.


THE DOOR WAS UNLOCKED.
LORD PERIC, I BEG YOU TO RECONSIDER.
THE TRUE SCIENTIST DOES NOT CONSIDER DANGER.


PERIC ENTERED AND WAS SEALED IN WITH THE DREADED PRISONER OF ZERSS.
RAISE THE CELL TO THE SKYWARD POSITION.

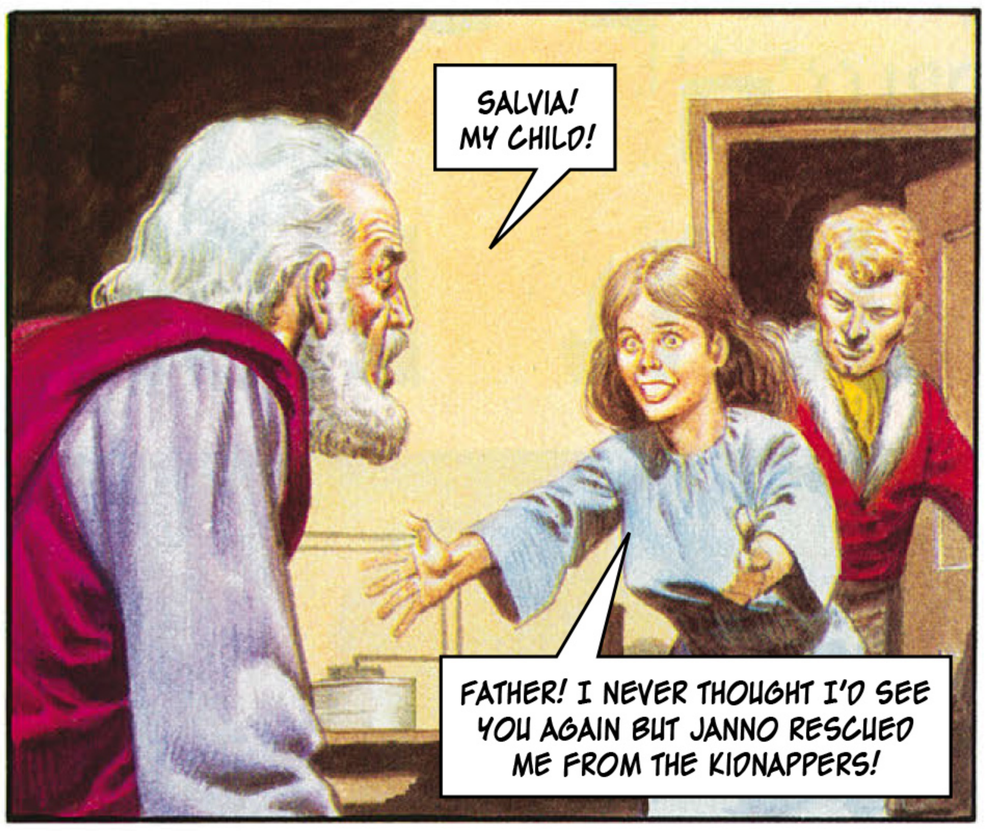

ALL THAT LONG DAY THE CELL REMAINED IN THE SKY IN FULL VIEW. TOWARDS EVENING...
LOOK! LORD PERIC'S SIGNAL TO BE BROUGHT DOWN.
THANK THE STARS HE STILL LIVES. LOWER THE CELL.

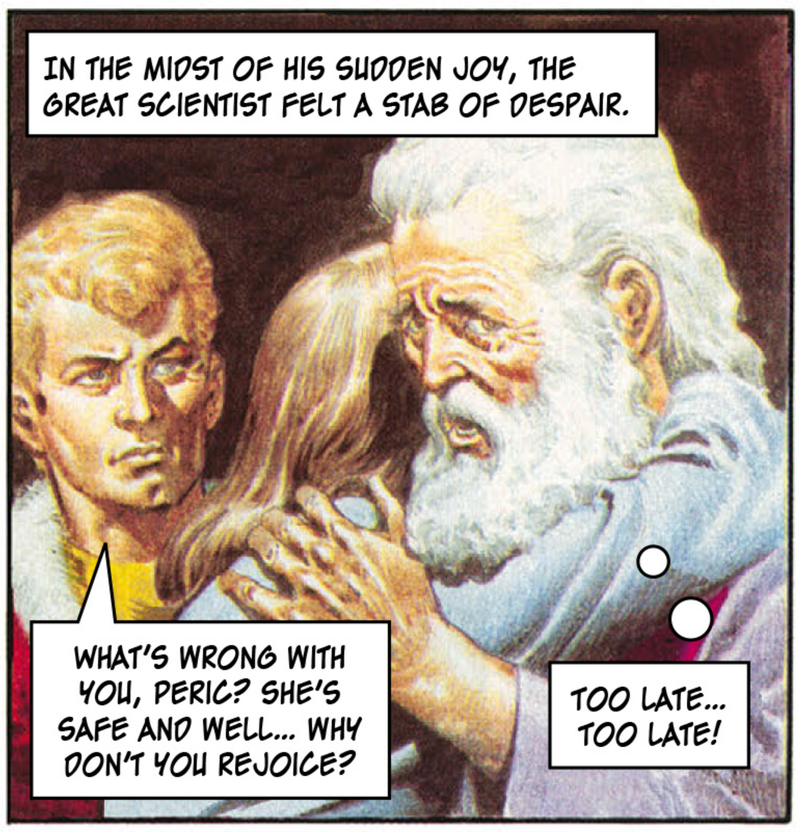
THEY STARED IN WONDER TO SEE THE GREAT SCIENTIST NONE THE WORSE FOR HIS NIGHTMARE EXPERIENCE.
THEN HE DIDN'T ATTACK YOU?
NO. I SUBDUED HIS MIND AND SUBJECTED HIM TO SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONING. HE IS NOW SLEEPING PEACEFULLY.


LATER, AS PERIC'S CRAFT CARRIED HIM AWAY INTO THE GATHERING DARKNESS, HE LOOKED BACK.
HOW LONG UNTIL THEY DISCOVER THEIR LOSS?

PERIC WENT BELOW. THERE WAS NOW ANOTHER PASSENGER ABOARD THE CRAFT!
HEH! HEH! HEH!
IT WAS THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET.

BACK AT MEPHO'S VILLA, JANNO MADE HIS MOVE.
THE FIRST GUARD NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HIM. A SECOND, STATIONED ON THE MAIN DOOR OF THE VILLA, JUST HAD TIME TO BRING HIS WEAPON TO AIM...
...BEFORE HE WAS FELLED!
AAAGGHHH
SALVIA RUSHED TO THE BARS OF HER CELL AS SHE SAW THE FAMILIAR FIGURE OF HER FRIEND.
JANNO! BUT HOW...?
STAND BACK, SALVIA. I'M GOING TO BLAST THE LOCK!
THE NOISE OF JANNO'S SHOTS RAISED THE ALARM, THE NIGHT WAS ALIVE WITH SHOUTS AS THEY CREPT OUT INTO THE GROUNDS OF THE VILLA.
THE PRISONER'S ESCAPED!
I'VE GOT MY CAR WAITING THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL!
MOMENTS LATER THEY WERE SPEEDING AWAY FROM THE VILLA WITH PROJECTILES SCREECHING ABOUT THEIR BENT HEADS!
OPEN RAPID FIRE!
PERIC WAS BACK AT HIS HOME, FACING A NIGHT OF SLEEPLESSNESS AND ANGUISH, WHEN A SERVANT ENTERED.
WHAT DO YOU WANT?WHAT IS IT? DIDN'T I TELL YOU I WAS NOT TO BE DIS-TURBED TILL MORNING.
MASTER! IT'S LORD JANNO... AND THE YOUNG MISTRESS...



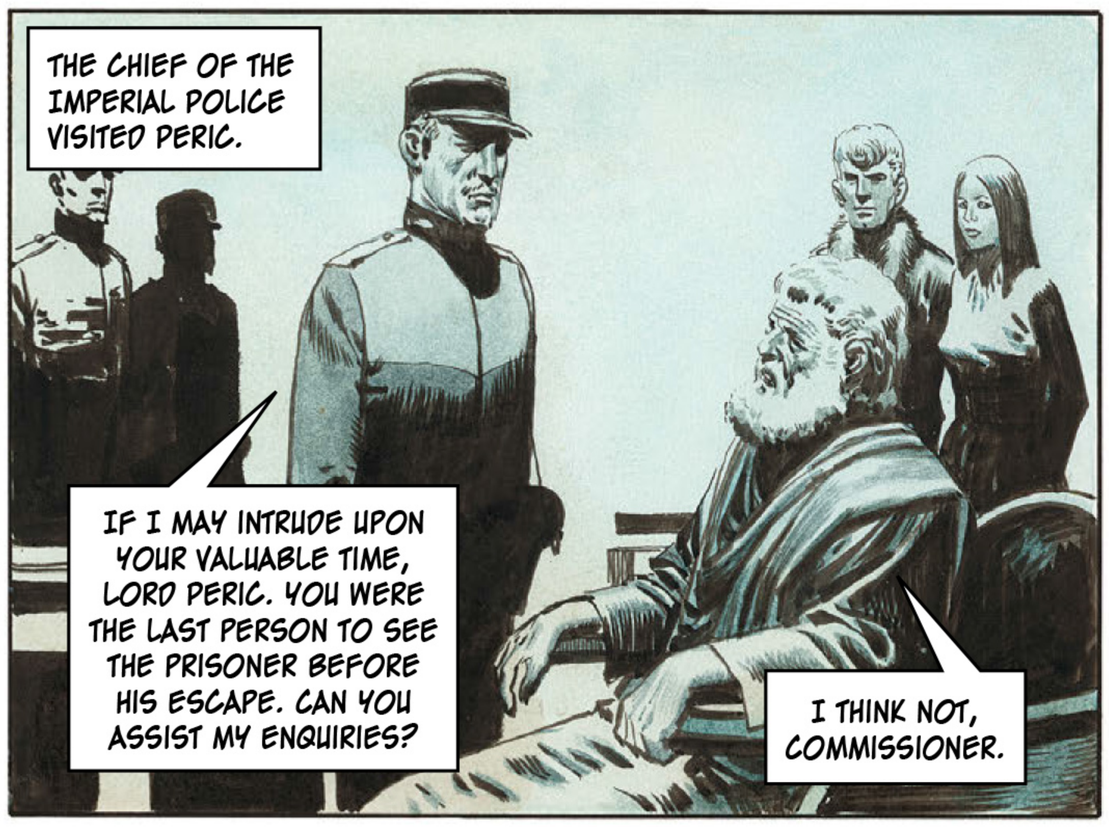


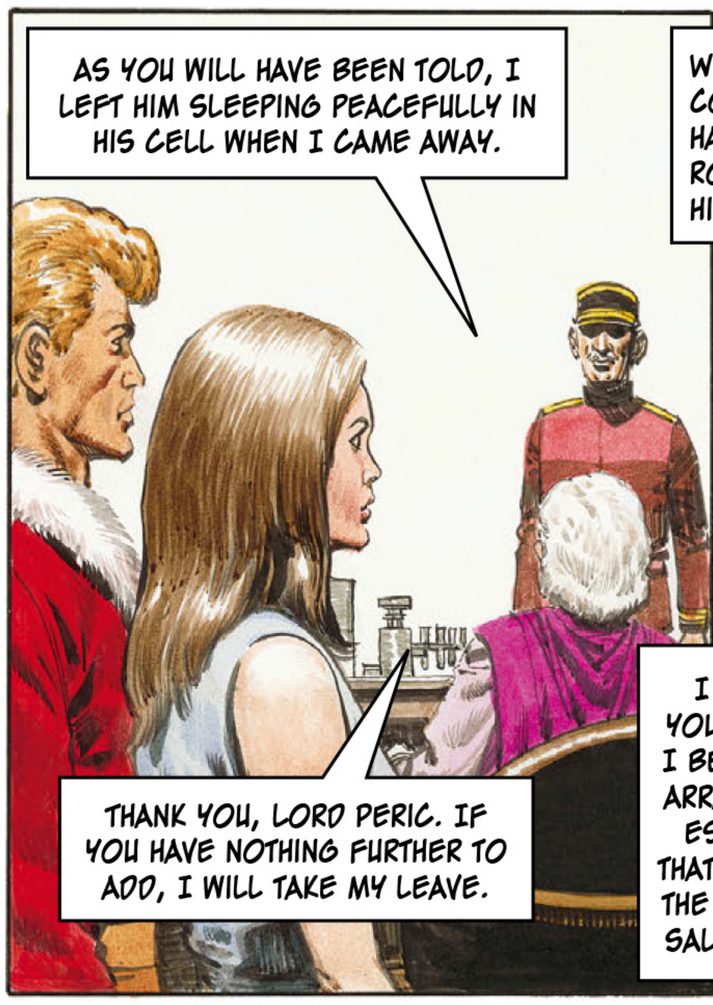
THERE WAS A RUINED VORG FORT OVERLOOKING THE SEA BEYOND THE CITY. THE SINISTER MEPHO STOOD ON THE MOONLIT RAMPARTS, WAITING... WAITING...

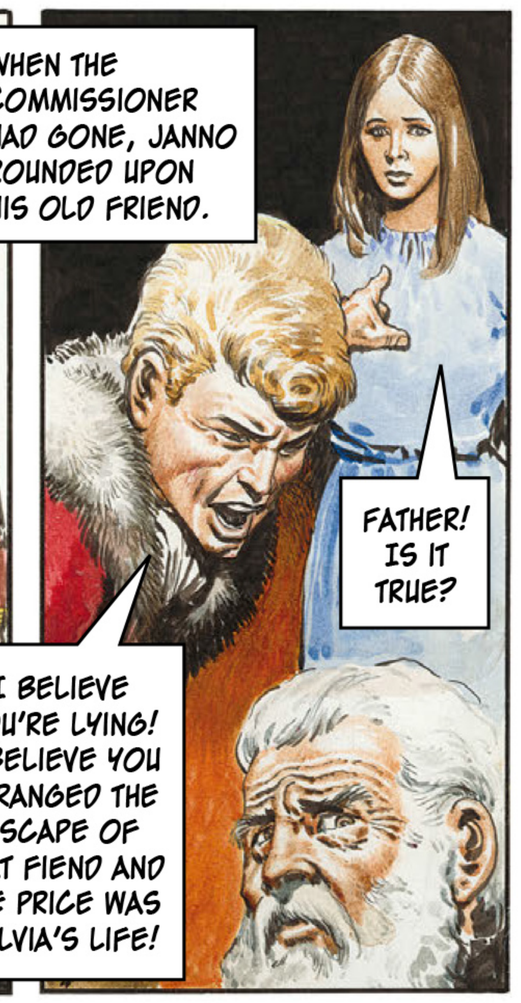
FOR HIS SAKE, I HOPE PERIC'S ESCAPE PLAN WORKED. THAT OLD FOOL SHOULD HAVE TOLD THE PRISONER TO MAKE HIS WAY HERE. SO WHERE IS HE?

NEXT MORNING, ON THE PRISON ISLAND OF ZERSS, THE GUARDS LOWERED THE STRANGE CELL FROM THE SKY ONLY TO FIND IT – EMPTY!
THE FIEND HAS GONE!
SOUND THE ALARM!

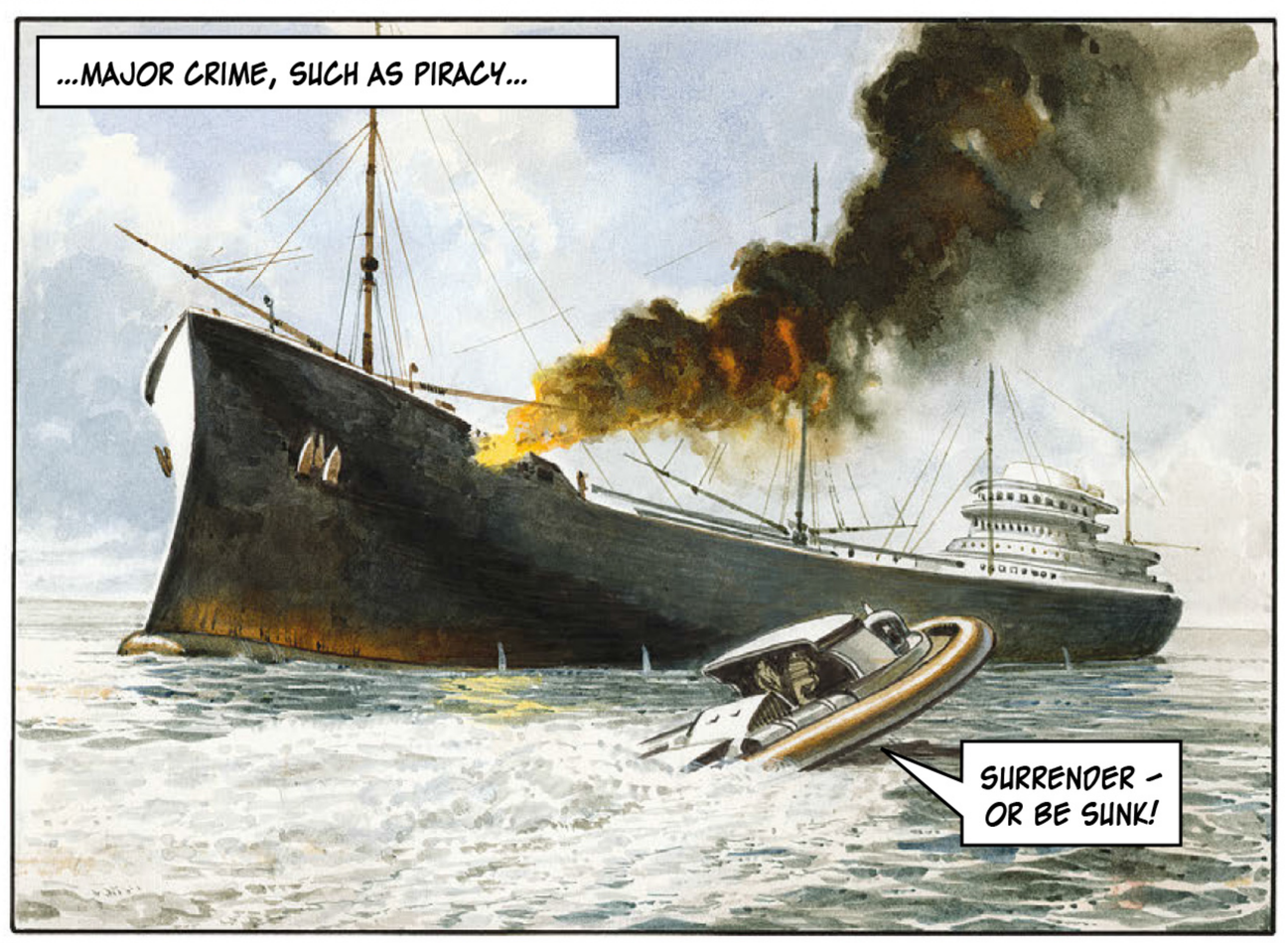
THE SHOCKING NEWS REACHED TRIGAN CITY WITHIN A FEW MOMENTS.
WE INTERRUPT OUR PROGRAMME FOR A DISASTER ANNOUNCEMENT. THE PRISONER OF ZERSS HAS ESCAPED!
AAAAAAH! WHERE'S HE GOING TO STRIKE FIRST?
THE WILD BEAST IS ON THE LOOSE!


THE CHIEF OF THE IMPERIAL POLICE VISITED PERIC.
IF I MAY INTRUDE UPON YOUR VALUABLE TIME, LORD PERIC. YOU WERE THE LAST PERSON TO SEE THE PRISONER BEFORE HIS ESCAPE. CAN YOU ASSIST MY ENQUIRIES?
I THINK NOT, COMMISSIONER.


AS YOU WILL HAVE BEEN TOLD, I LEFT HIM SLEEPING PEACEFULLY IN HIS CELL WHEN I CAME AWAY.
THANK YOU, LORD PERIC. IF YOU HAVE NOTHING FURTHER TO ADD, I WILL TAKE MY LEAVE.

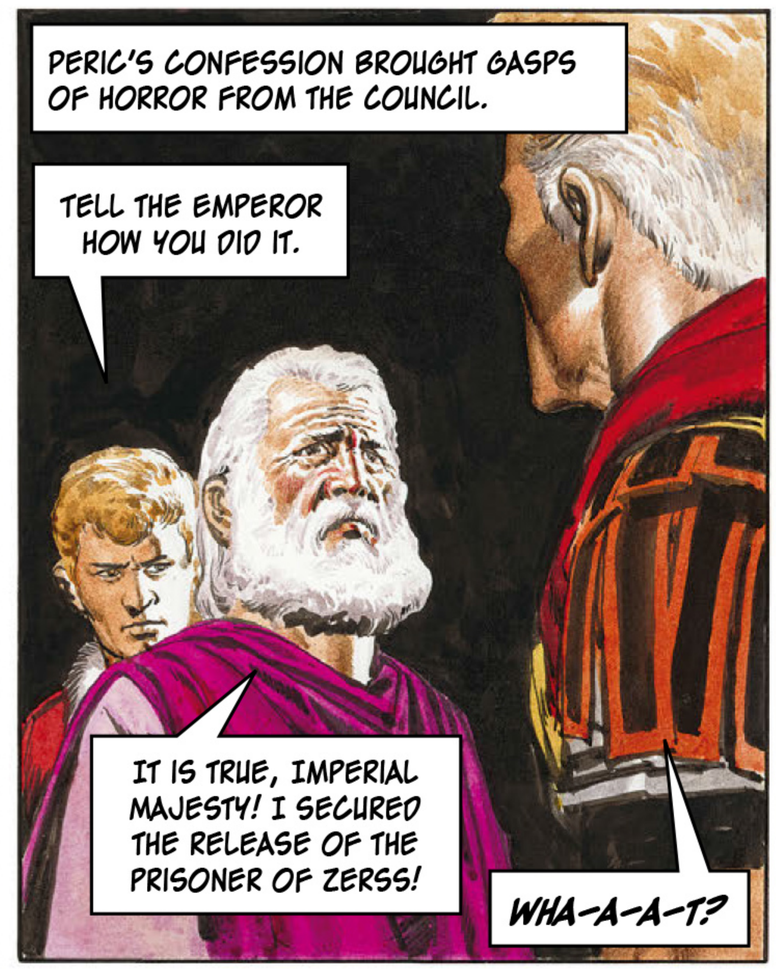

WHEN THE COMMISSIONER HAD GONE, JANNO ROUNDED UPON HIS OLD FRIEND.
FATHER! IS IT TRUE?
I BELIEVE YOU'RE LYING! I BELIEVE YOU ARRANGED THE ESCAPE OF THAT FIEND AND THE PRICE WAS SALVIA'S LIFE!

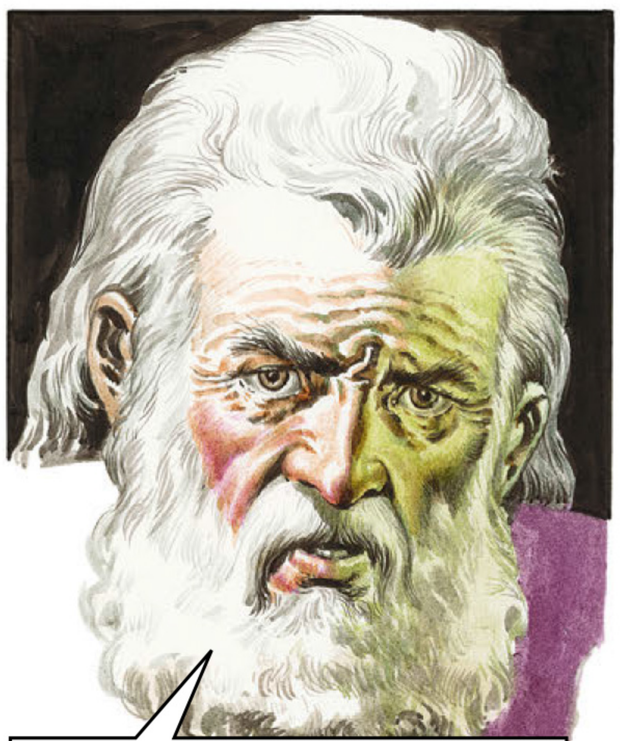
CRIME WAS WIDESPREAD AND HIGHLY ORGANISED IN THE SPRAWLING TRIGAN EMPIRE. PETTY CRIME...

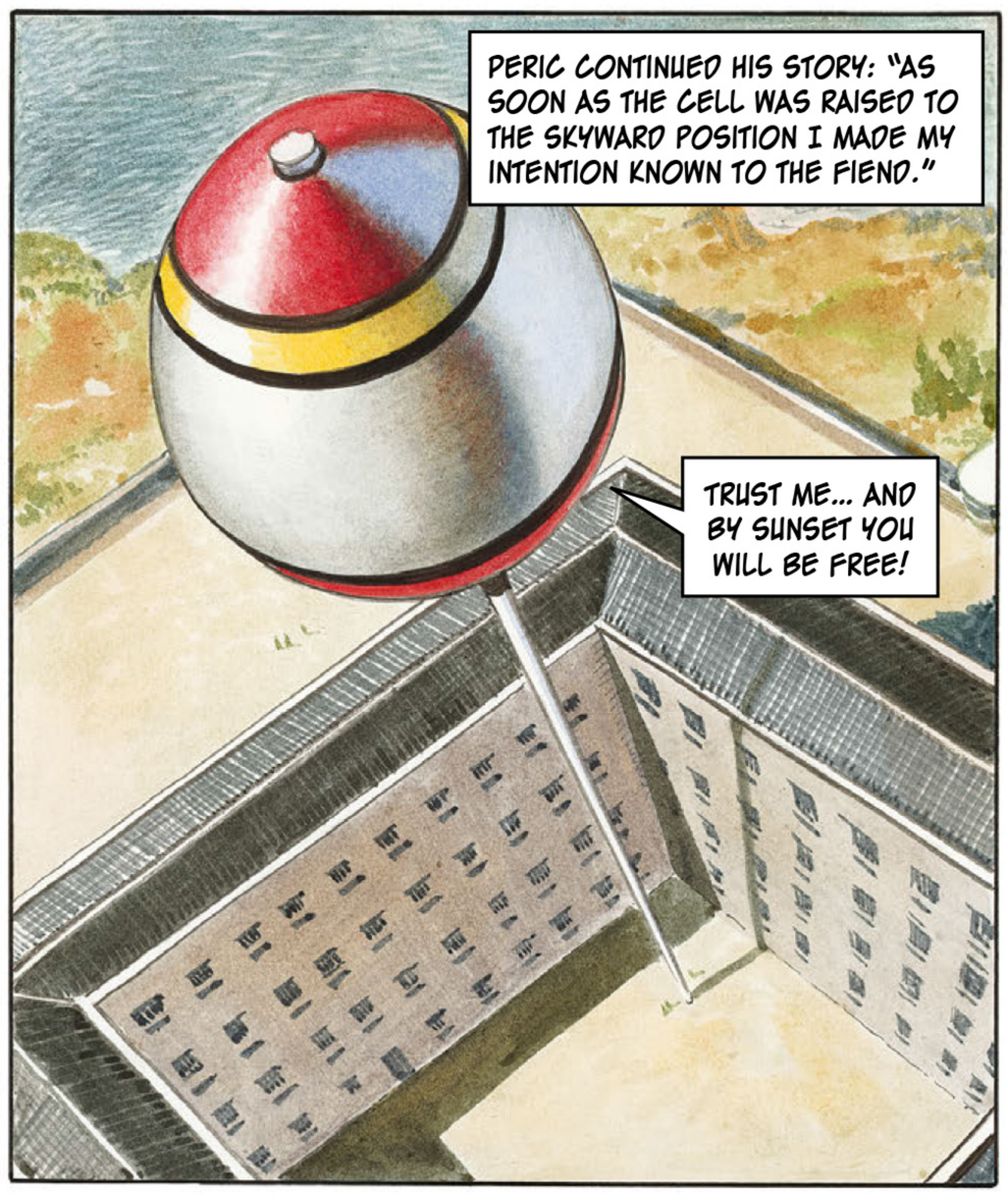

...MAJOR CRIME, SUCH AS PIRACY...
SURRENDER – OR BE SUNK!

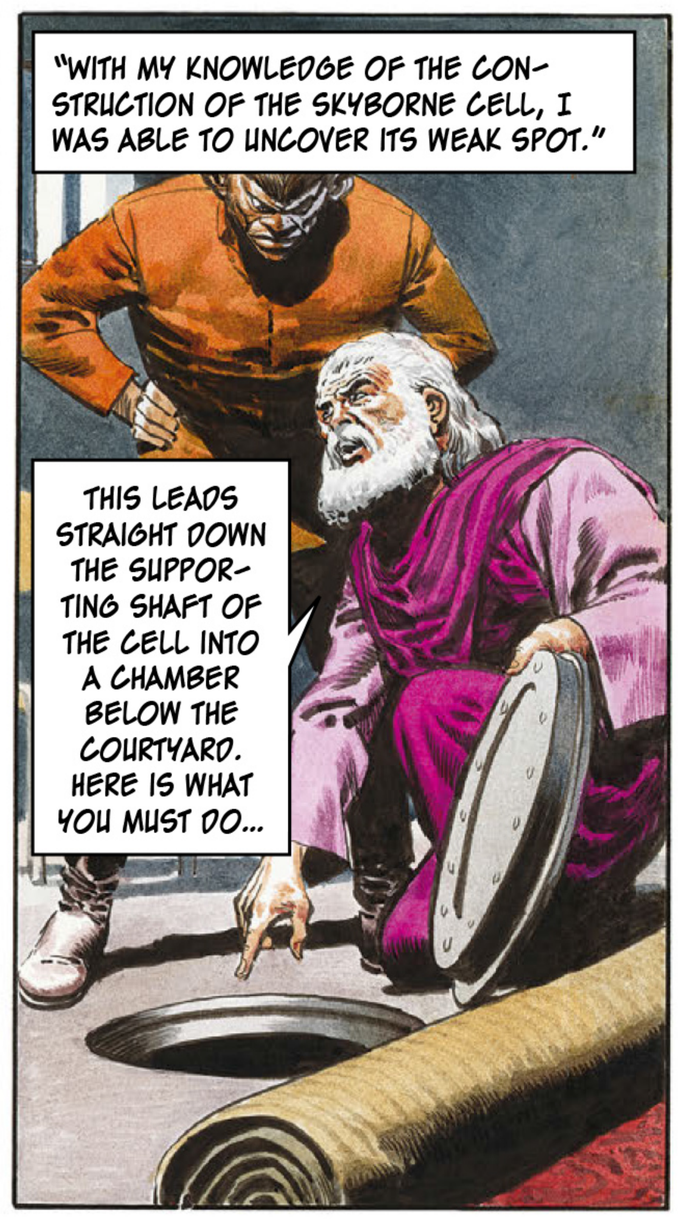
...THE BRIBING OF POLITICIANS...
VOTE AS I SUGGEST AND THERE WILL BE MORE TO FOLLOW!
A LARGE PROPORTION OF THE PROFIT FROM ALL THIS CRIME WENT INTO THE COFFERS OF ONE MAN WHO LIVED AN OUTWARDLY RESPECTABLE LIFE IN A LUXURIOUS VILLA ABOVE TRIGAN CITY. HIS NAME WAS SOYAB.
SOYAB'S COMFORTABLE WORLD FELL APART!
I REGRET THAT YOUR VALET IS NO LONGER WITH US!
AAAAA! YOU!
SOYAB ROSE LATE THAT FATEFUL MORNING, JUST AS HE ALWAYS DID.
VALET! ASSIST ME TO MY BATH!
WHERE IS THE IDLE SCOUNDREL?
GO AWAY! DON'T HURT ME! I'LL MAKE YOU RICH! I'LL GIVE YOU ANYTHING! ANYTHING!
THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET BRUSHED THE WAILING WRETCH ASIDE.
YOU'RE GIVING ME NOTHING. I'M TAKING YOU OVER! FROM NOW ON, IF YOU PLEASE ME, I'LL LET YOU STAY ALIVE AS ONE OF MY HENCHMEN.
THE FIRST STEP IN 'THE GREAT REIGN OF TERROR' HAD BEEN TAKEN!

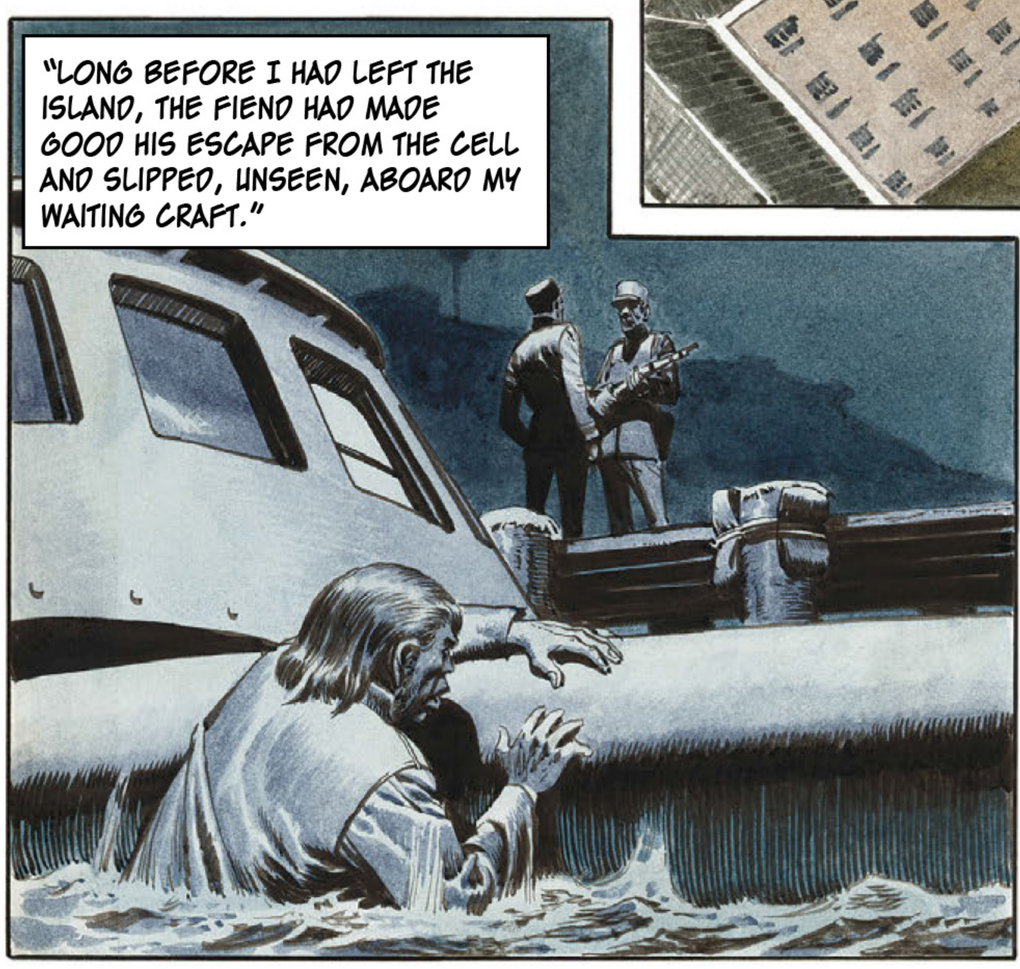
NEVER IN LIVING MEMORY HAD ANYONE BEEN KNOWN TO INTRUDE UPON A MEETING OF THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL.
JANNO! HOW DARE YOU BURST IN HERE!
PERIC MUST SEE YOU IMMEDIATELY, UNCLE. HE HAS A CONFESSION TO MAKE!


PERIC'S CONFESSION BROUGHT GASPS OF HORROR FROM THE COUNCIL.
TELL THE EMPEROR HOW YOU DID IT.
IT IS TRUE, IMPERIAL MAJESTY! I SECURED THE RELEASE OF THE PRISONER OF ZERSS!
WHA-A-A-T?

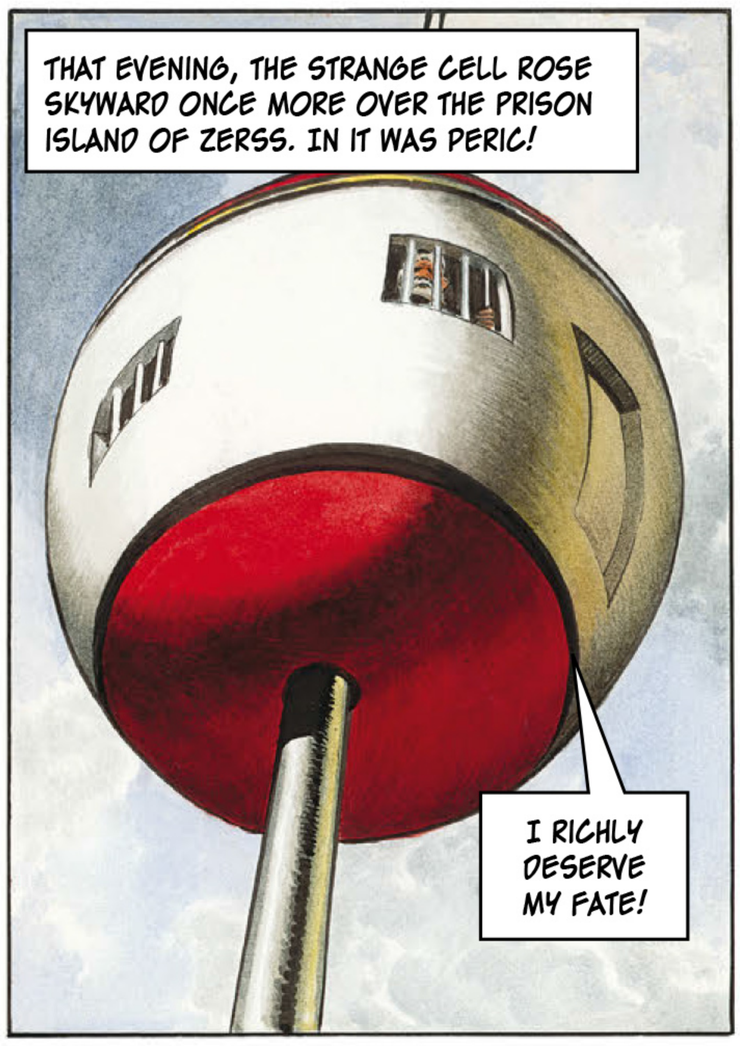

AT MID-DAY YESTERDAY, ARMED WITH THE DETAILS OF THE PRISONER'S CELL, I VOYAGED TO THE ISLAND OF ZERSS. WITH YOUR MAJESTY'S PERMISSION, I WAS ALLOWED TO INTERVIEW THE PRISONER PRIVATELY.


PERIC CONTINUED HIS STORY: "AS SOON AS THE CELL WAS RAISED TO THE SKYWARD POSITION I MADE MY INTENTION KNOWN TO THE FIEND."
TRUST ME... AND BY SUNSET YOU WILL BE FREE!


"WITH MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SKYBORNE CELL, I WAS ABLE TO UNCOVER ITS WEAK SPOT."
THIS LEADS STRAIGHT DOWN THE SUPPORTING SHAFT OF THE CELL INTO A CHAMBER BELOW THE COURTYARD. HERE IS WHAT YOU MUST DO...


"LONG BEFORE I HAD LEFT THE ISLAND, THE FIEND HAD MADE GOOD HIS ESCAPE FROM THE CELL AND SLIPPED, UNSEEN, ABOARD MY WAITING CRAFT."

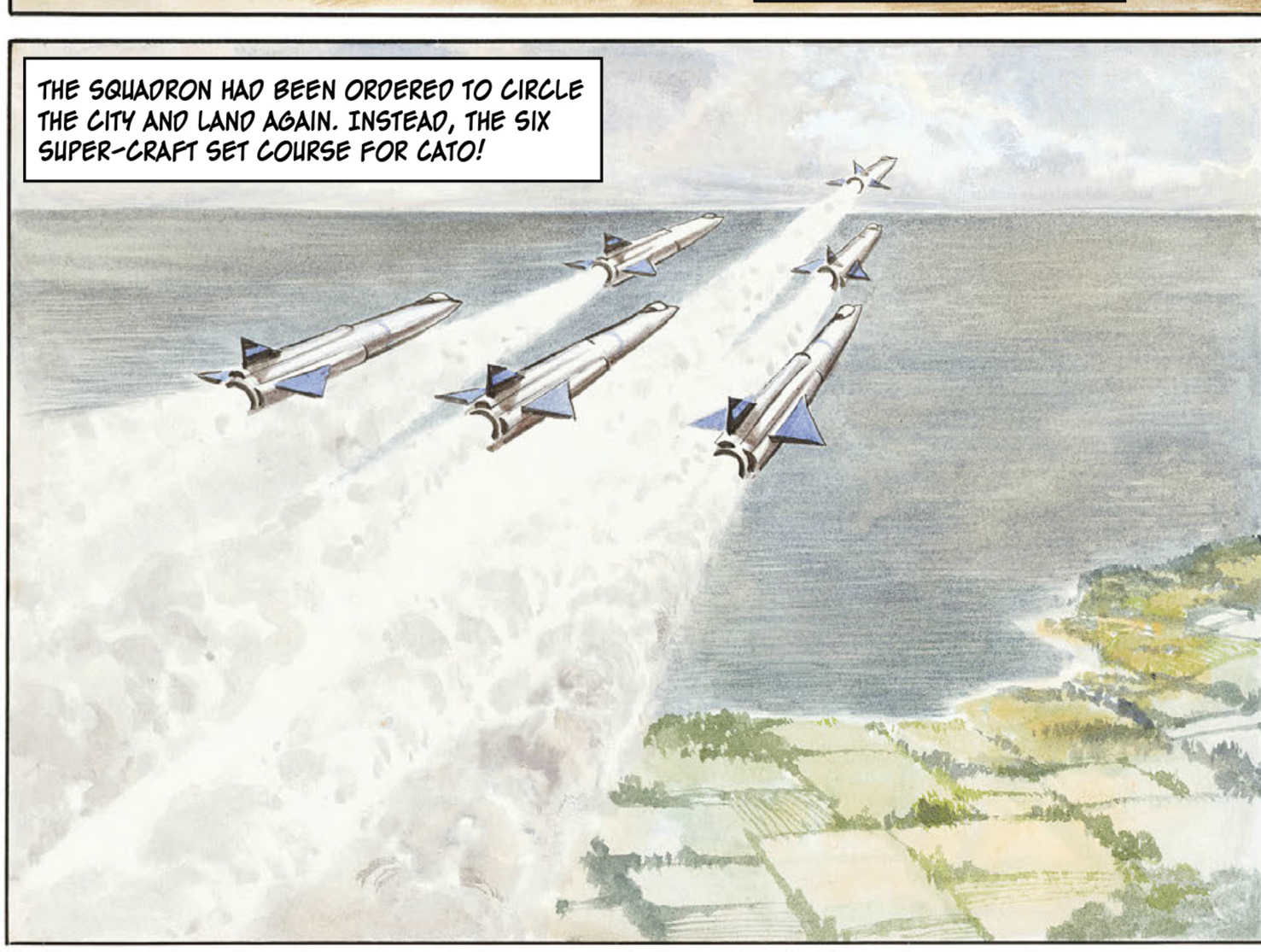
THE FURY OF THE EMPEROR OF THE TRIGANS WAS DREADFUL TO BEHOLD!
YOU COULD DO THAT? AND TO THINK I CALLED YOU MY FRIEND! I SHOULD KILL YOU WITH MY BARE HANDS! INSTEAD, YOU WILL TAKE THE FIEND'S PLACE AS THE NEW PRISONER OF ZERSS!


THAT EVENING, THE STRANGE CELL ROSE SKYWARD ONCE MORE OVER THE PRISON ISLAND OF ZERSS. IN IT WAS PERIC!
I RICHLY DESERVE MY FATE!

SOME DAYS LATER...
A MESSAGE FOR HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY.
NO NEWS OF THE FIEND SINCE HE GOT LOOSE.
HAVE PATIENCE, BRAG. THE WORST WILL HAPPEN ALL TOO SOON!

TRIGO READ THE MESSAGE AND A SHOCK OF ALARM PASSED ROUND THE COUNCIL TABLE OF THE EMPIRE.
"PROUD EMPEROR! WITH THE AID OF MY SECRET WEAPON, I WILL TURN YOUR MIGHTY EMPIRE INTO A SHAMBLES!" SIGNED "THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET"!
SECRET WEAPON? WHAT DOES HE MEAN BY THAT?

THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE FIRST SQUADRON OF A NEW DESIGN OF SUPERERIOR FIGHTING-CRAFT TOOK OFF FROM TRIGAN CITY AIR FLEET BASE.
LET THE CATONS GO TO WAR WITH US AGAIN IF THEY DARE! THAT SINGLE SQUADRON COULD MOP UP THEIR ENTIRE FLEET!


THE SQUADRON HAD BEEN ORDERED TO CIRCLE THE CITY AND LAND AGAIN. INSTEAD, THE SIX SUPER-CRAFT SET COURSE FOR CATO!

THE UNBELIEVABLE NEWS WAS BROUGHT TO THE EMPEROR LATER THAT DAY.
THE SQUADRON LANDED IN CATO AND THE PILOTS TURNED OVER THEIR CRAFT TO THE EMPIRE'S ENEMIES!
IT CAN'T BE TRUE. IT CAN'T!

IT WAS TRIGO'S BIRTHDAY. AS WAS THE CUSTOM, THE IMPERIAL GUARDS LED A DAZZLING CEREMONIAL MARCH-PAST IN THE GREAT SQUARE OF TRIGAN CITY.

SUDDENLY, ONE OF THE GUARDSMEN PULLED HIS STEED OUT OF LINE AND LOWERED HIS LANCE.
DIE, YOU TYRANT!

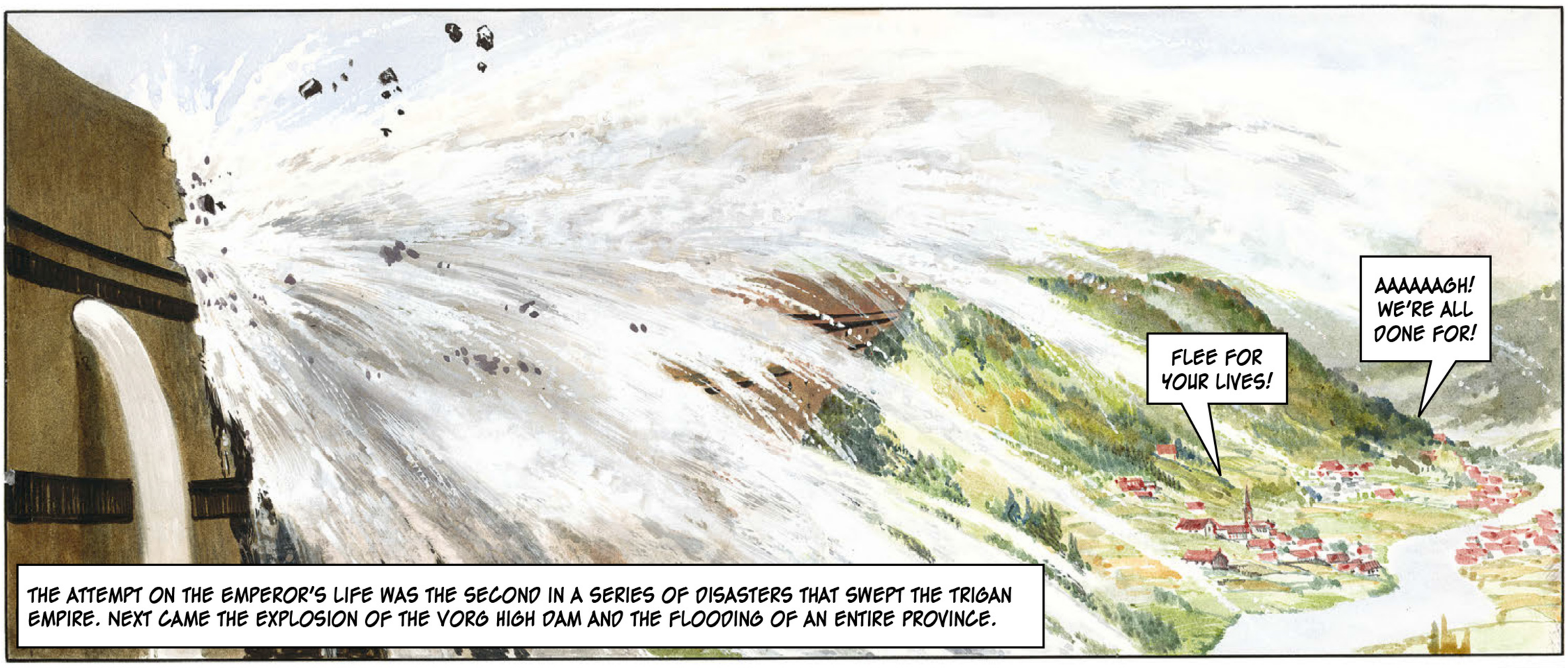
HE GALLOPED STRAIGHT FOR THE EMPEROR!
YA-A-A-AH!

TRIGO STOOD HIS GROUND UNTIL THE LAST INSTANT. THEN HE DUCKED AND THE SHARP LANCE SLAMMED INTO THE STONEWORK ABOVE HIS HEAD!

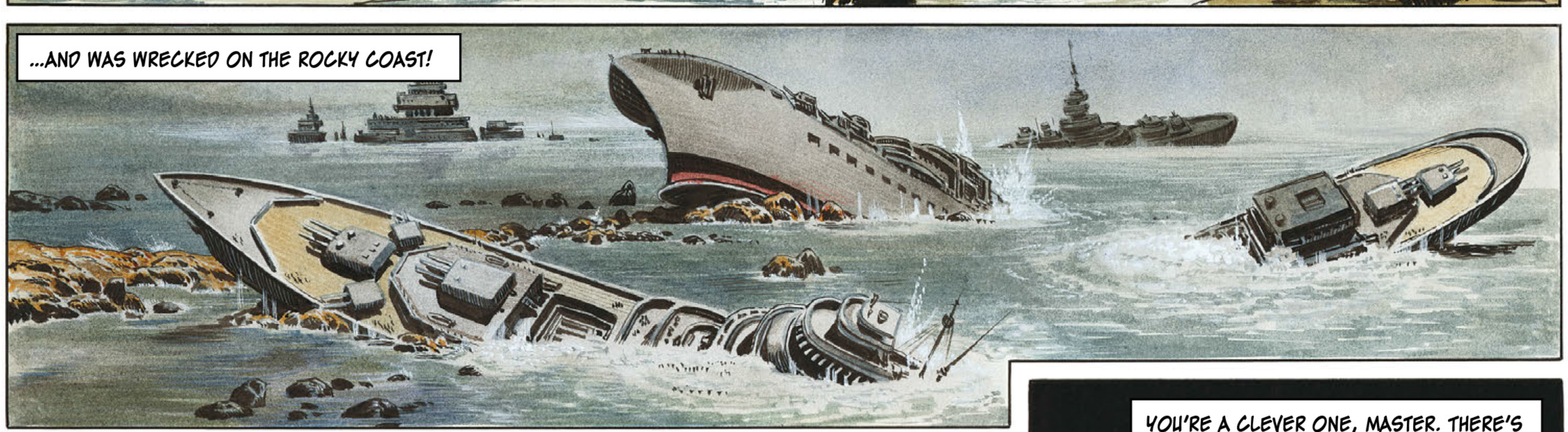
THE EMPEROR GRABBED AT THE SIDE-TRAPPINGS AND WAS DRAGGED DOWN THE STEPS.

TRIGO FELL HEAVILY. THE TREACHEROUS GUARDSMAN MADE OFF AT THE GALLOP AND WAS SOON LOST IN THE LABYRINTH OF CITY STREETS.
IMPERIAL MAJESTY!

TRIGO WAS BRUISED BUT OTHERWISE UNHARMED.
WHY DID HE DO IT? WHY?
I KNOW THAT MAN WELL, IMPERIAL MAJESTY. LIKE HIS BROTHER BEFORE HIM, THE REGIMENT WAS HIS LIFE. I WOULD HAVE STAKED MY HEAD ON HIS LOYALTY.

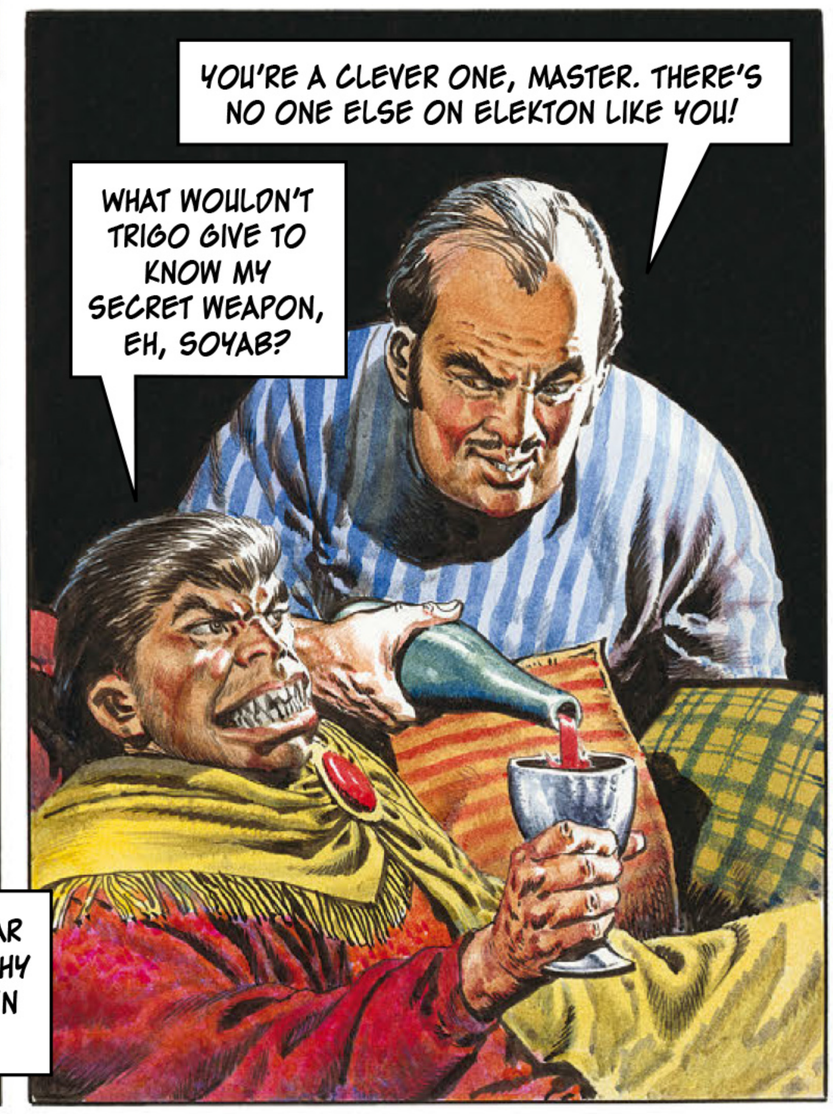

THE ATTEMPT ON THE EMPEROR'S LIFE WAS THE SECOND IN A SERIES OF DISASTERS THAT SWEPT THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. NEXT CAME THE EXPLOSION OF THE VORG HIGH DAM AND THE FLOODING OF AN ENTIRE PROVINCE.
FLEE FOR YOUR LIVES!
AAAAAAGH! WE'RE ALL DONE FOR!

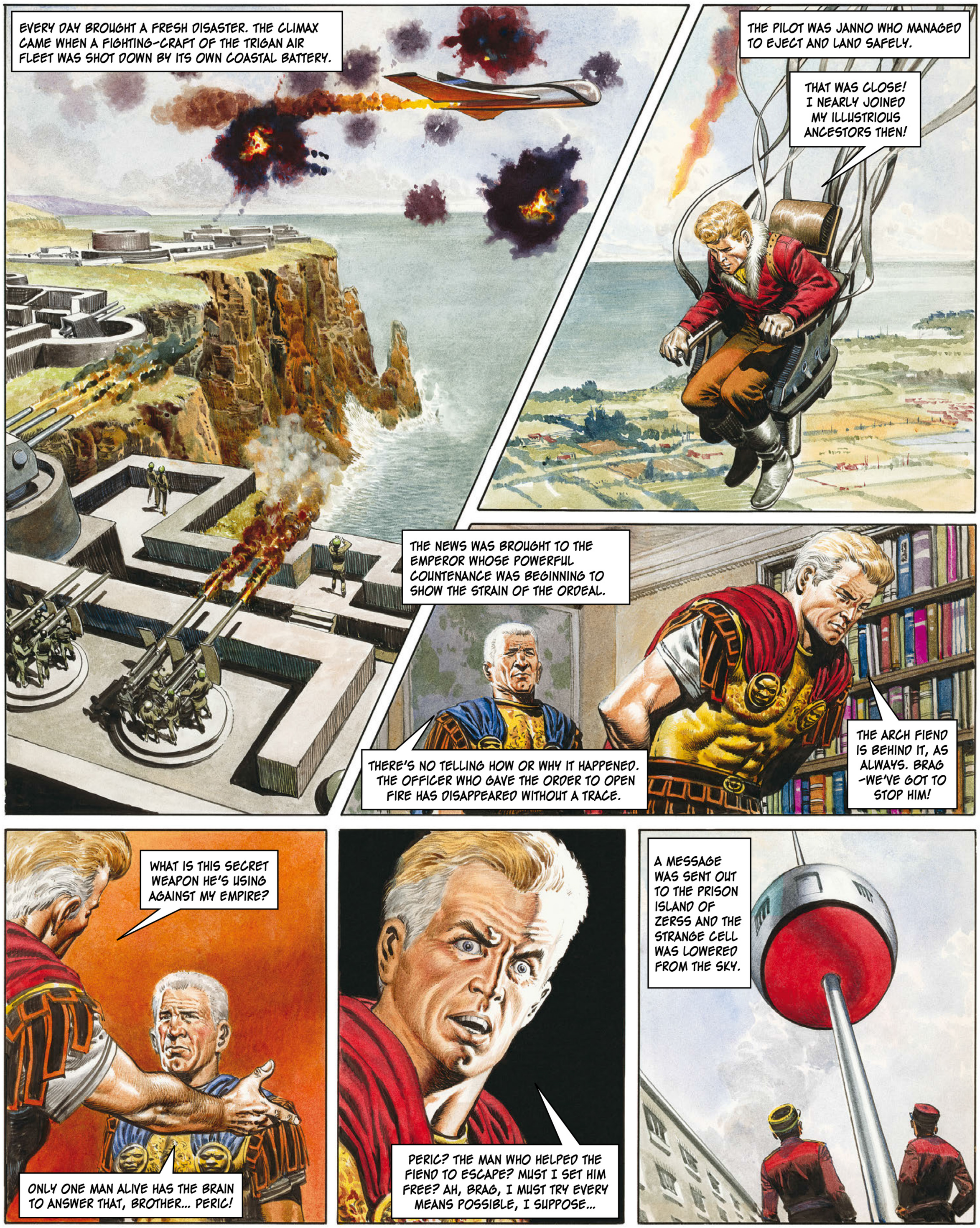
THEN CAME THE STAGGERING BLOW TO NATIONAL SAFETY. CRUISING ALONG THE FRINGE OF THE GREAT OCEAN, THE TRIGAN BATTLE FLEET TOOK THE WRONG COURSE...


...AND WAS WRECKED ON THE ROCKY COAST!

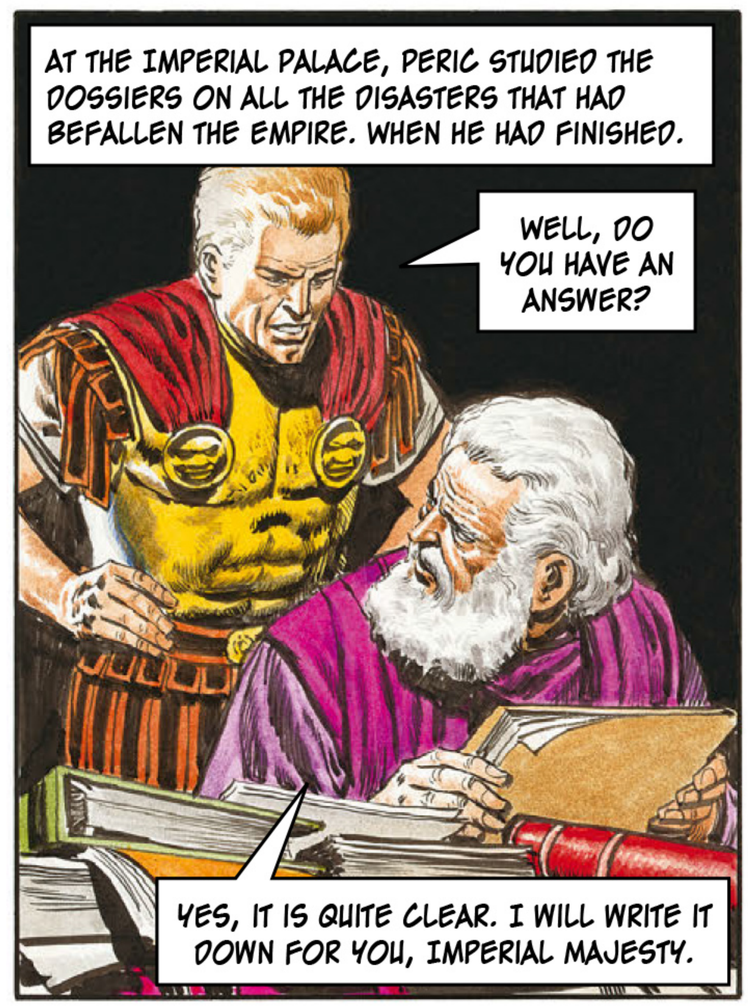
TRIGO AND HIS IMPERIAL COUNCIL WERE IN DESPAIR.
THAT MONSTER IS BEHIND IT ALL! HE SWORE TO TURN MY EMPIRE INTO A SHAMBLES AND HE IS WELL ON THE WAY TO DOING IT. BUT HOW, THAT IS THE QUESTION... WHAT IS HIS SECRET WEAPON?

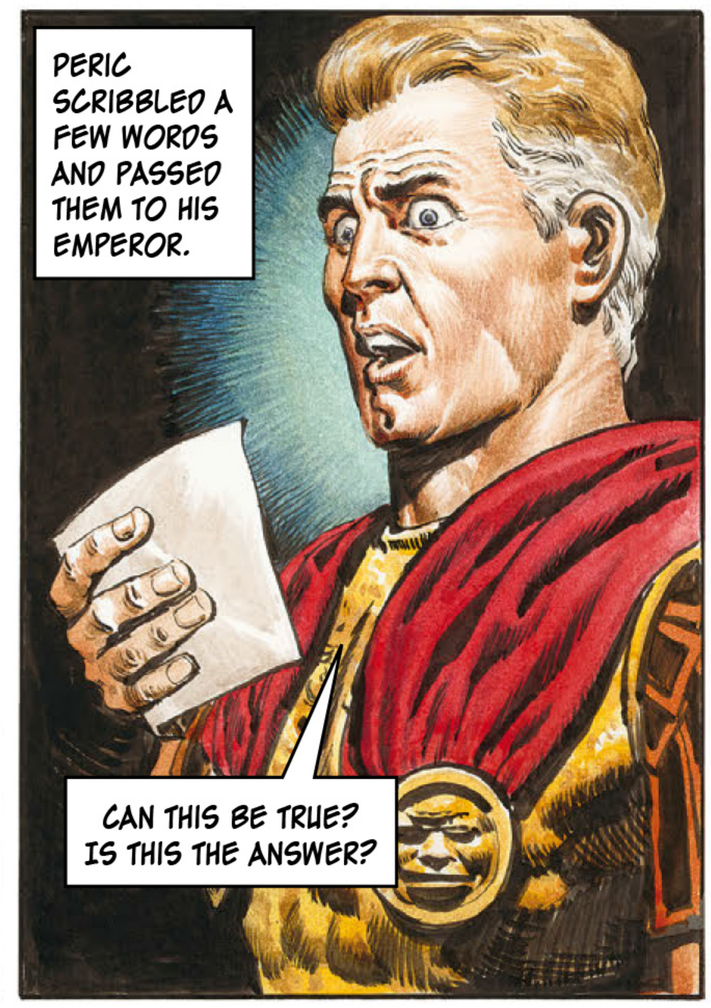
IN A LUXURIOUS VILLA ABOVE TRIGAN CITY, "THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET" TOOK HIS EASE AND CONTEMPLATED HIS TRIUMPHS.
I GIVE HIS PRECIOUS TRIGAN EMPIRE ANOTHER TWO LUNAR MONTHS BEFORE IT CRUMBLES AROUND TRIGO'S UNWORTHY EARS. HEH! THE POOR FOOL WILL LOSE BOTH HIS CROWN AND HIS LIFE WITHOUT EVER KNOWING HOW I DID IT!


YOU'RE A CLEVER ONE, MASTER. THERE'S NO ONE ELSE ON ELEKTON LIKE YOU!
WHAT WOULDN'T TRIGO GIVE TO KNOW MY SECRET WEAPON, EH, SOYAB?


EVERY DAY BROUGHT A FRESH DISASTER. THE CLIMAX CAME WHEN A FIGHTING-CRAFT OF THE TRIGAN AIR FLEET WAS SHOT DOWN BY ITS OWN COASTAL BATTERY.
THE PILOT WAS JANNO WHO MANAGED TO EJECT AND LAND SAFELY.
THAT WAS CLOSE! I NEARLY JOINED MY ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS THEN!
THE NEWS WAS BROUGHT TO THE EMPEROR WHOSE POWERFUL COUNTENANCE WAS BEGINNING TO SHOW THE STRAIN OF THE ORDEAL.
THERE'S NO TELLING HOW OR WHY IT HAPPENED. THE OFFICER WHO GAVE THE ORDER TO OPEN FIRE HAS DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE.
THE ARCH FIEND IS BEHIND IT, AS ALWAYS. BRAG -WE'VE GOT TO STOP HIM!
WHAT IS THIS SECRET WEAPON HE'S USING AGAINST MY EMPIRE?
ONLY ONE MAN ALIVE HAS THE BRAIN TO ANSWER THAT, BROTHER... PERIC!
PERIC? THE MAN WHO HELPED THE FIEND TO ESCAPE? MUST I SET HIM FREE? AH, BRAG, I MUST TRY EVERY MEANS POSSIBLE, I SUPPOSE...
A MESSAGE WAS SENT OUT TO THE PRISON ISLAND OF ZERSS AND THE STRANGE CELL WAS LOWERED FROM THE SKY.

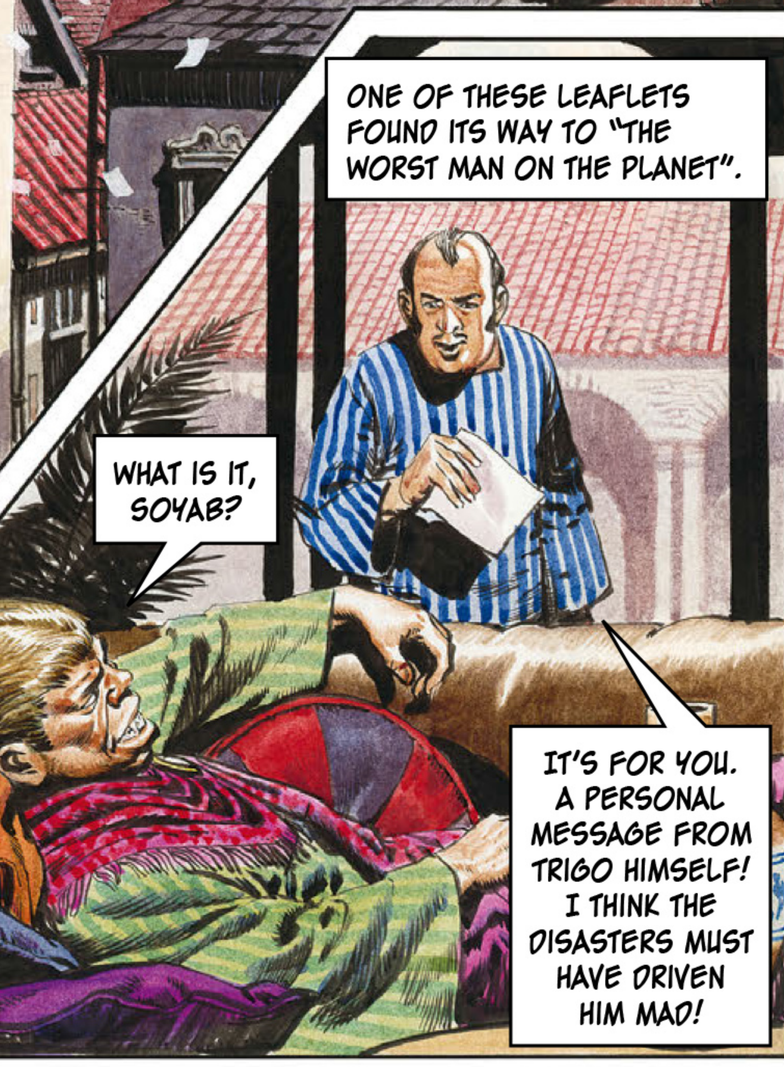
OUT STEPPED PERIC, THE WISEST MAN ON ELEKTON.
YOU ARE TO BE TAKEN TO HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY.
I AM AT HIS MAJESTY'S COMMAND, NOW AS ALWAYS.


AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE, PERIC STUDIED THE DOSSIERS ON ALL THE DISASTERS THAT HAD BEFALLEN THE EMPIRE. WHEN HE HAD FINISHED.
WELL, DO YOU HAVE AN ANSWER?
YES, IT IS QUITE CLEAR. I WILL WRITE IT DOWN FOR YOU, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.


PERIC SCRIBBLED A FEW WORDS AND PASSED THEM TO HIS EMPEROR.
CAN THIS BE TRUE? IS THIS THE ANSWER?

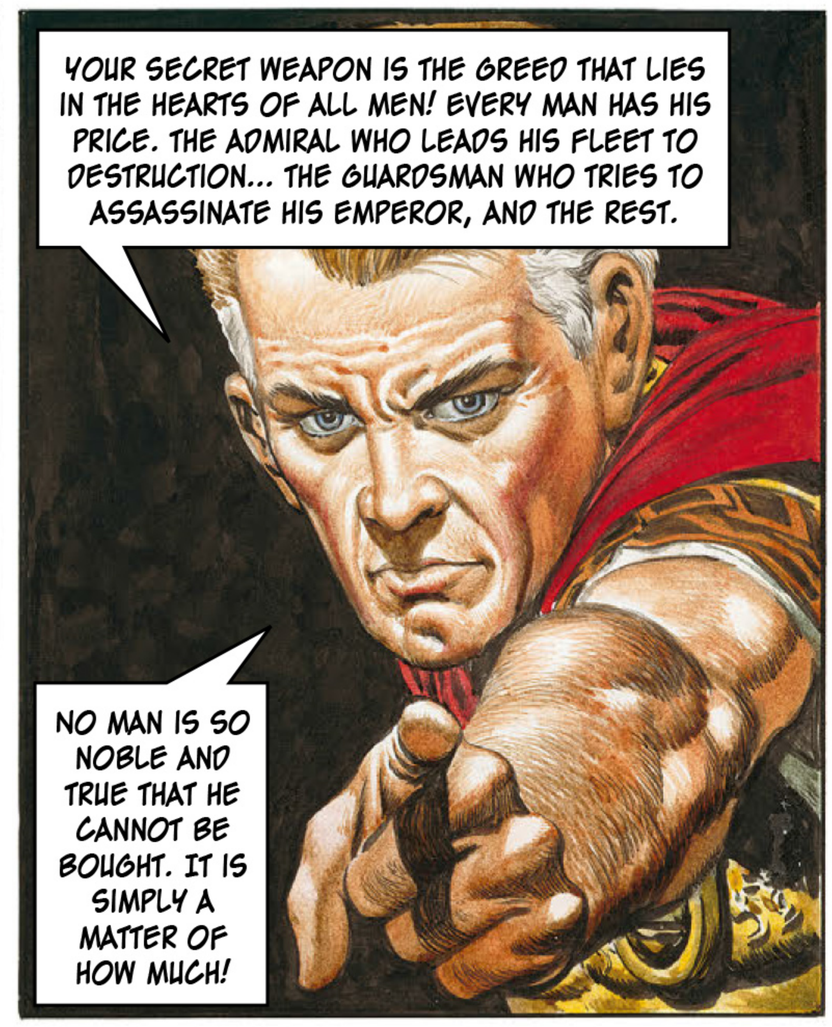
YES IT IS... AND YOU CAN USE THE SAME WEAPON TO DESTROY HIM!
AND BY ALL THE DEMONS OF DAVELI I'LL DO IT, TOO!

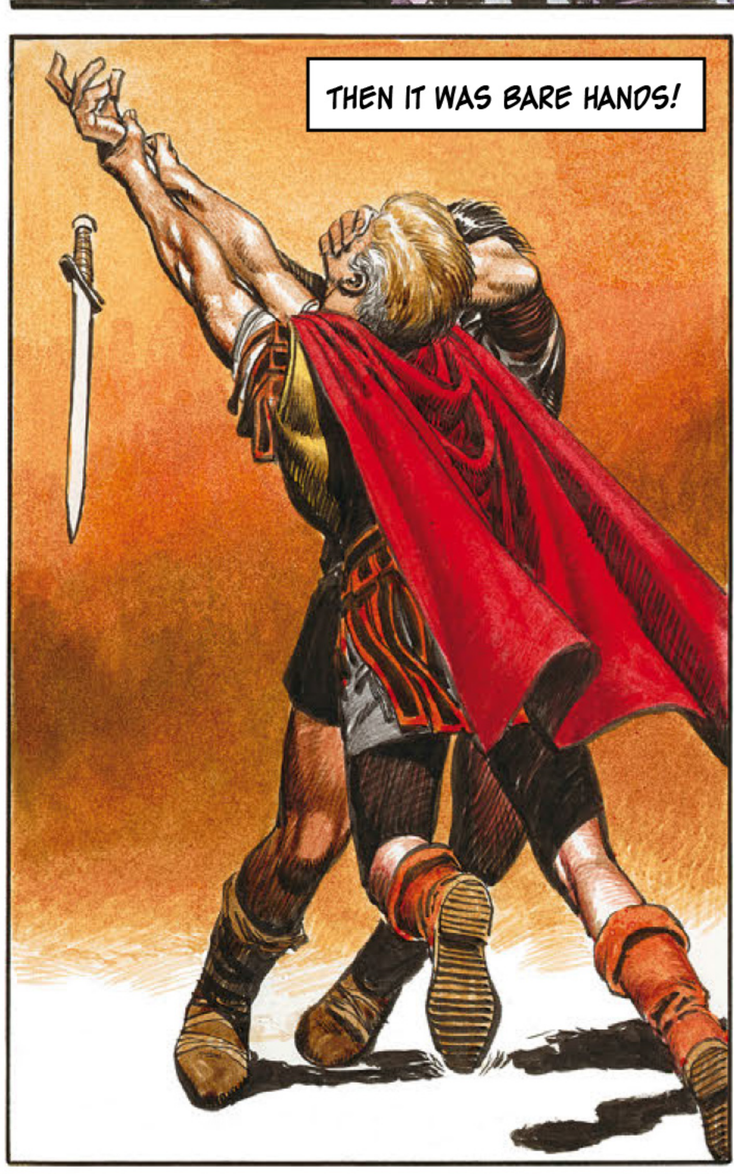
AT DAWN THE NEXT DAY, COUNTLESS PRINTED LEAFLETS WERE SCATTERED FROM THE AIR OVER THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE EMPIRE.


ONE OF THESE LEAFLETS FOUND ITS WAY TO "THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET".
WHAT IS IT, SOYAB?
IT'S FOR YOU. A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM TRIGO HIMSELF! I THINK THE DISASTERS MUST HAVE DRIVEN HIM MAD!

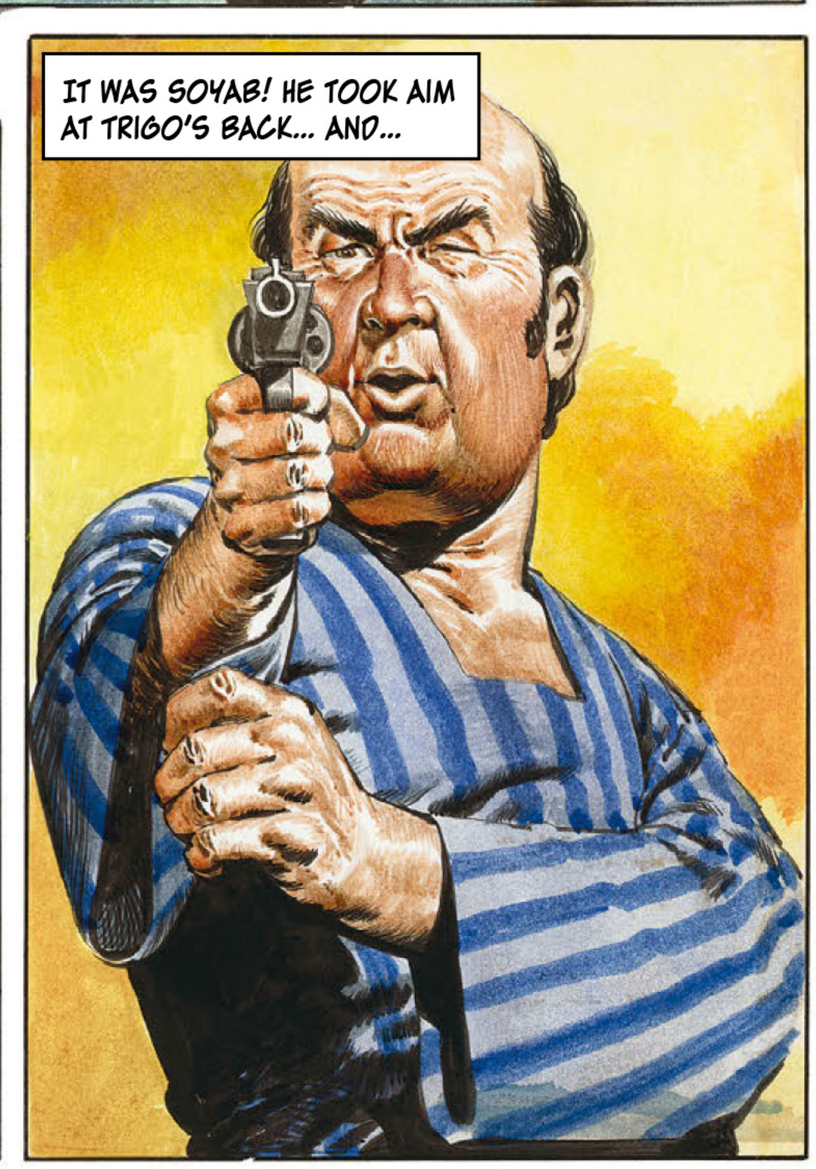
I THINK YOU ARE RIGHT, SOYAB. THE FOOL IS AS GOOD AS MAKING ME A PRESENT OF HIS IMPERIAL CROWN!

THERE IS A DESOLATE VALLEY IN THE WILDERNESS OF VORG, A PLACE OF SHADOWS AND MYSTERY, REPUTEDLY HAUNTED BY THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD. TO THIS FORBIDDING SPOT CAME THE EMPEROR TRIGO.
WITH HIM HE BROUGHT THE IMPERIAL CROWN OF THE TRIGANS. HE LAID THIS PRICELESS, JEWELLED DIADEM ON A PINNACLE OF ROCK.
THEN HE CRIED OUT IN A LOUD VOICE THAT ECHOED AND RE-ECHOED THROUGHOUT THE GRIM VALLEY.
I AM READY FOR YOU, ARCH-FIEND!
SUDDENLY!
AAAH!
THERE WAS A MIRTHLESS LAUGH AND THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET LOOMED ABOVE HIM!
HEH! I COULD HAVE SLAIN YOU, TRIGO, BUT I INTEND TO DO THAT LATER WITH MY BARE HANDS!





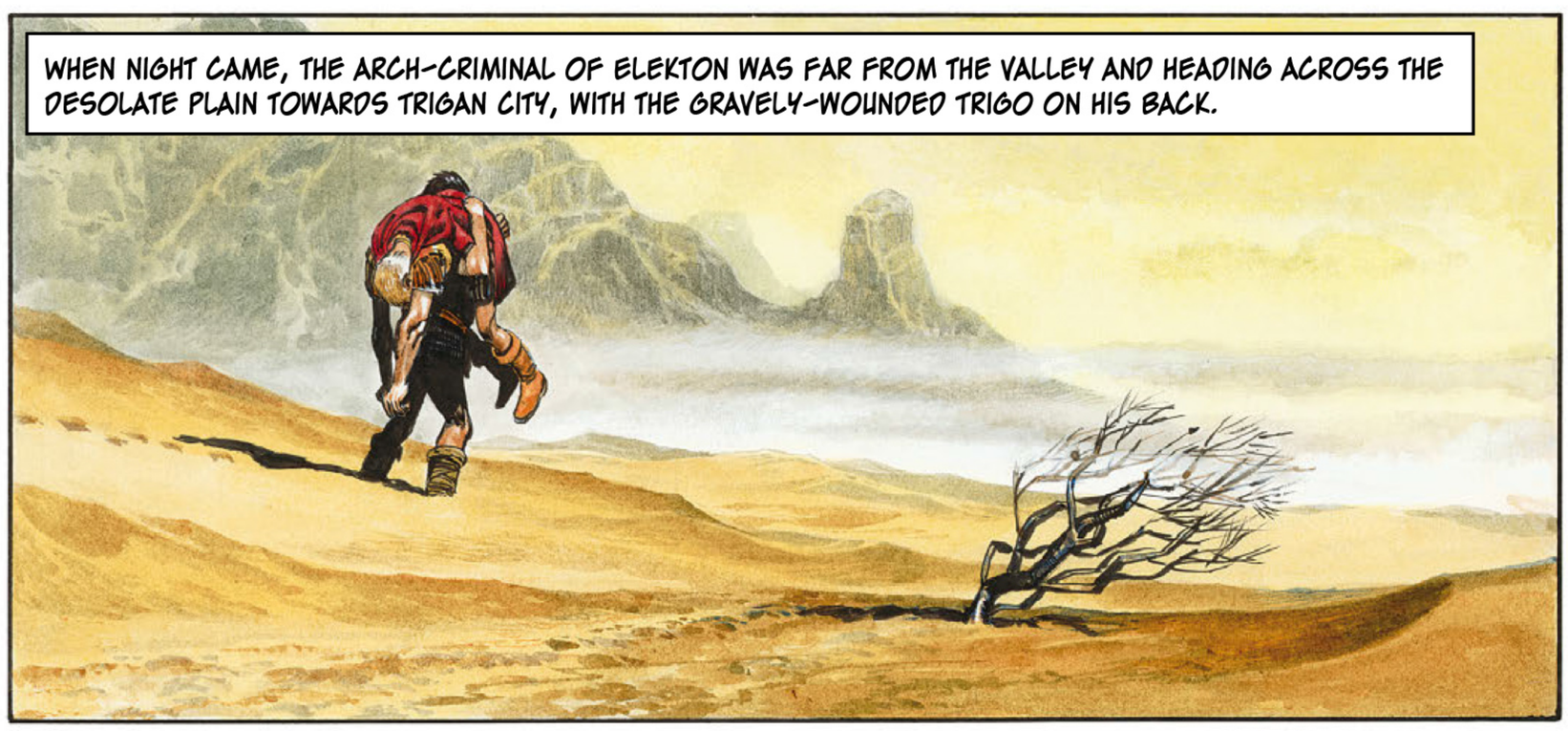
DON LAWRENCE



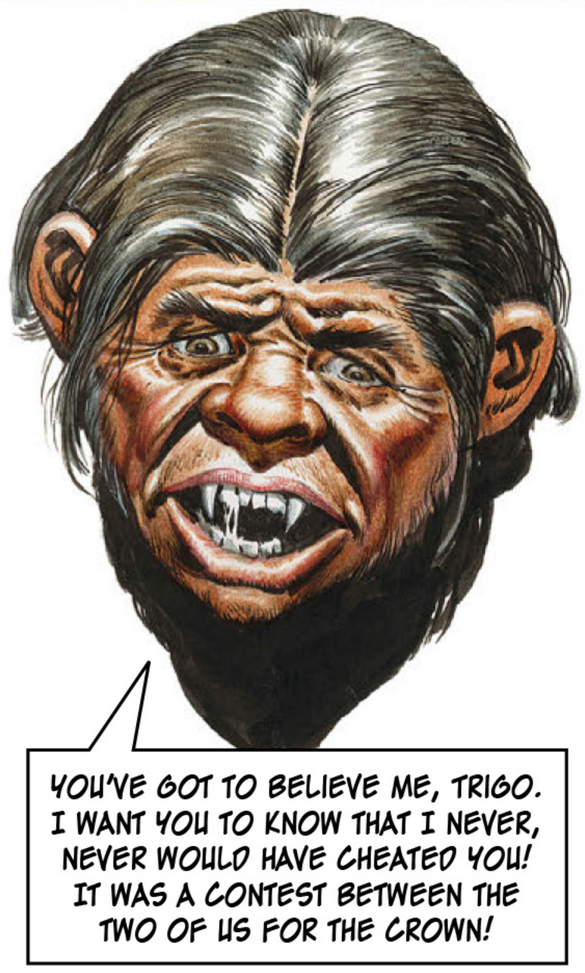
THE SHOT RANG OUT AND TRIGO PITCHED TO THE GROUND!
AAAAGH!

THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET STRODE TOWARDS HIS HENCHMAN SOYAB.
DID I DO WELL, MASTER?
MASTER? WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT?
FOOL! BLUNDERING IMBECILE!

SOYAB PAID DEARLY FOR HIS TREACHEROUS ACT.
AAAAAAAAAAHHH!


WHEN NIGHT CAME, THE ARCH-CRIMINAL OF ELEKTON WAS FAR FROM THE VALLEY AND HEADING ACROSS THE DESOLATE PLAIN TOWARDS TRIGAN CITY, WITH THE GRAVELY-WOUNDED TRIGO ON HIS BACK.

AT DAWN, TRIGO RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS. SOMEONE WAS GENTLY BATHING HIS FEVERED BROW. HE OPENED HIS EYES...
SOMEONE... SOMEONE SHOT ME!
YES. BUT IT WAS NONE OF MY DOING!


YOU'VE GOT TO BELIEVE ME, TRIGO. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I NEVER, NEVER WOULD HAVE CHEATED YOU! IT WAS A CONTEST BETWEEN THE TWO OF US FOR THE CROWN!

THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET BOWED HIS HEAD TO HIDE HIS DEEP EMOTION. IN THAT SAME INSTANT, TRIGO SAW A VENOMOUS COBRA GLIDE OUT FROM THE ROCKS NEARBY.

AAAAAH!

I'LL TAKE YOU BACK UP TO TRIGAN CITY. MAYBE WHEN YOU'RE RECOVERED WE CAN CARRY ON WHERE WE LEFT OFF...

DON LAWRENCE

THE ARCH-FIEND HEARD TRIGO'S GASP OF FEAR. SWIFTLY HE SNATCHED UP THE SERPENT AND CRACKED IT LIKE A WHIP, BREAKING IT'S NECK!

TRIGO LOOKED UP WONDERINGLY AT HIS COMPANION.

YOU SAVED MY LIFE!

YES. AND I REGRET TO SAY THAT IT HAS COST ME MY OWN...

THE BRUTE BIT ME!

FAREWELL, EMPEROR! YOU HAVE WON THE GAME! THE WORST MAN ON THE PLANET SALUTES THE VICTOR!

A TRIGAN PATROL FOUND THEM THAT EVENING. THEY WERE BOTH CARRIED BACK TO THE CITY.

SO ENDED THE STRANGE CAREER OF THE ARCH-CRIMINAL OF ELEKTON. THE CELL IN THE SKY THAT WAS TO HAVE BEEN HIS ABODE FOR LIFE WAS LEFT AS A PERMANENT MEMORIAL TO THE MAN WHO HAD SAVED THE EMPEROR OF THE TRIGANS.

IT WAS WISE OLD PERIC WHO SPOKE HIS EPITAPH.

HE WAS PROOF THAT ALL MAN, NO MATTER HOW EVIL, THEIR ACTIONS HAVE SOME GOOD IN HIM SOMEWHERE!

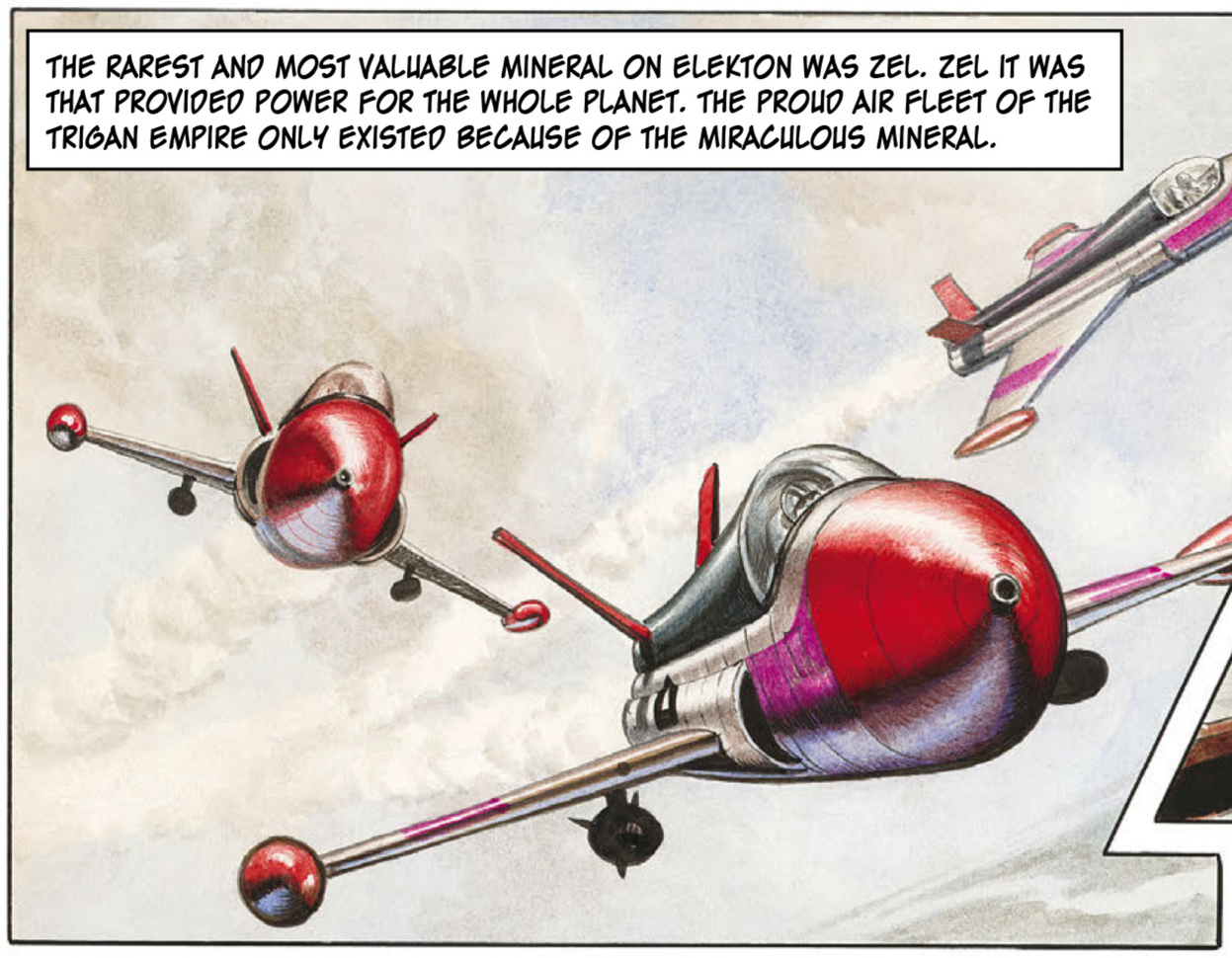
XXXII

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

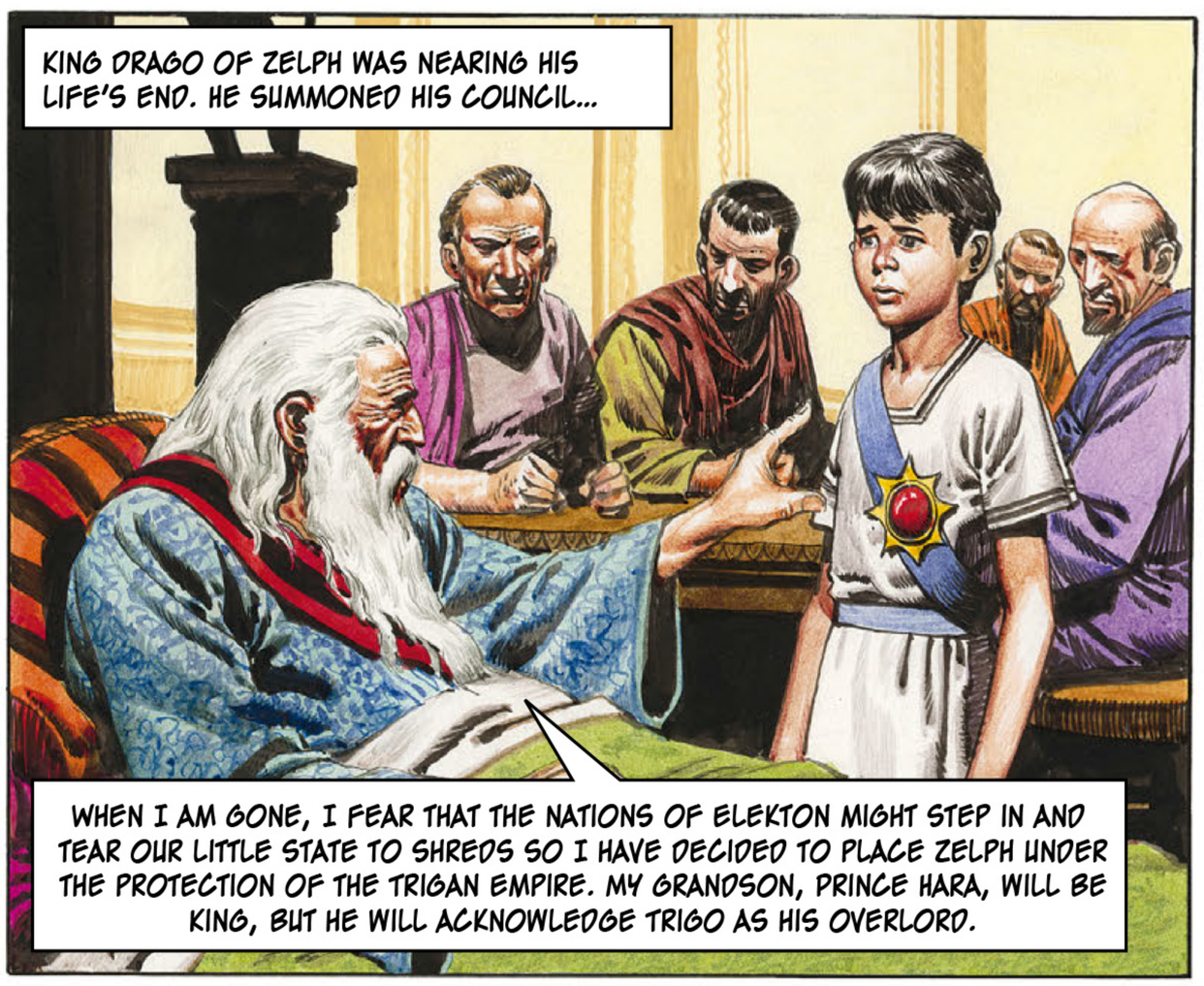
THE MINIATURE KILLERS OF ZELPH

Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 527-534

19th February 1972 – 8th April 1972

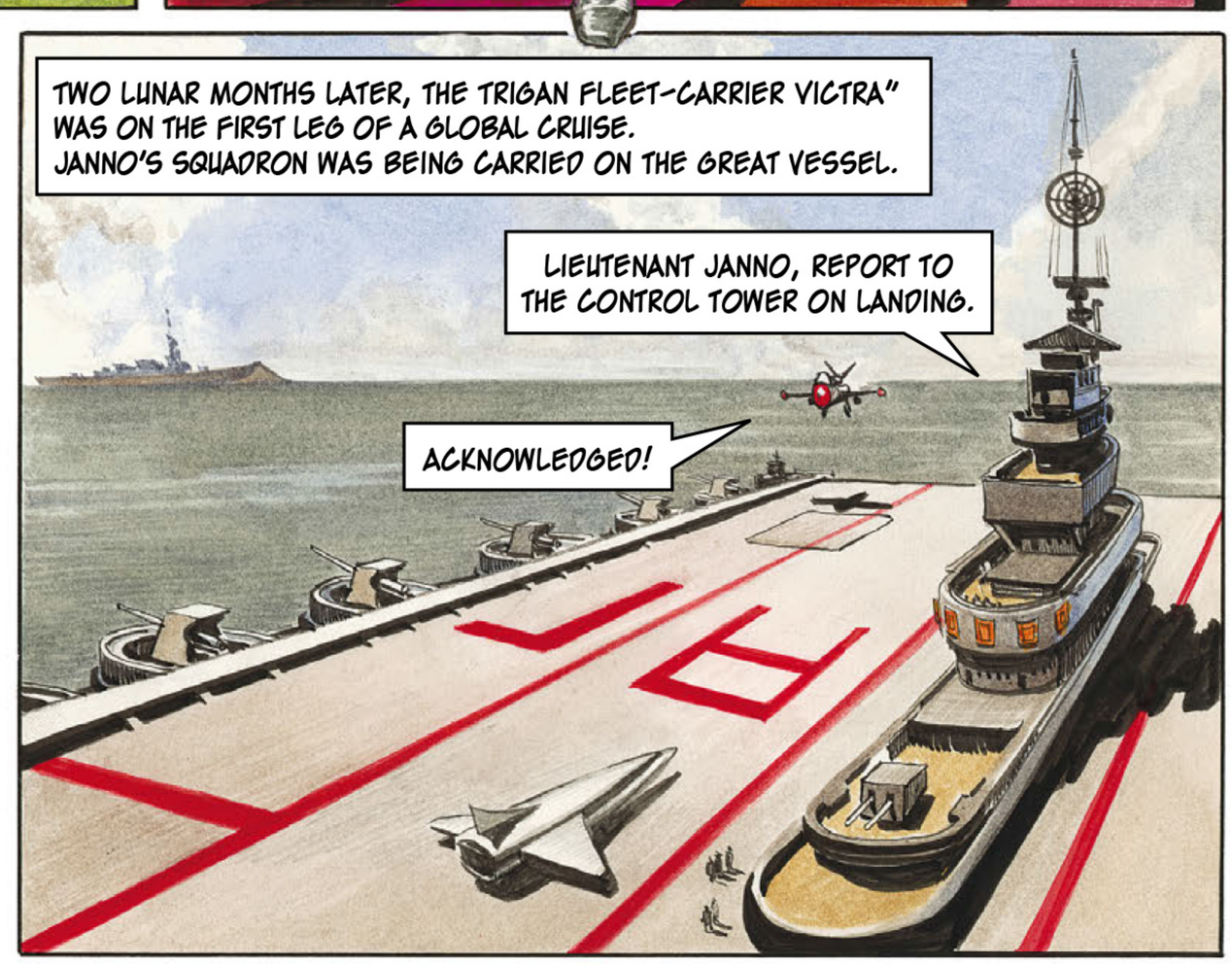

THE RAREST AND MOST VALUABLE MINERAL ON ELEKTON WAS ZEL. ZEL IT WAS THAT PROVIDED POWER FOR THE WHOLE PLANET. THE PROUD AIR FLEET OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE ONLY EXISTED BECAUSE OF THE MIRACULOUS MINERAL.

ZEL WAS MINED IN ONLY ONE PLACE ON THE PLANET: IN THE LITTLE INDEPENDENT KINGDOM OF ZELPH.


KING DRAGO OF ZELPH WAS NEARING HIS LIFE'S END. HE SUMMONED HIS COUNCIL...
WHEN I AM GONE, I FEAR THAT THE NATIONS OF ELEKTON MIGHT STEP IN AND TEAR OUR LITTLE STATE TO SHREDS SO I HAVE DECIDED TO PLACE ZELPH UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. MY GRANDSON, PRINCE HARA, WILL BE KING, BUT HE WILL ACKNOWLEDGE TRIGO AS HIS OVERLORD.

IN A GRIM CASTLE ABOVE THE CITY DWELT ZAPPO, DUKE OF ZELPH. HALF-COUSIN TO THE KING, HE WAS BETTER KNOWN AS 'BLACK ZAPPO'. THE NEWS OF DRAGO'S ACTION DROVE HIM TO FURY.
THAT DODDERING OLD IMBECILE! HANDING THE COUNTRY OVER TO THE ACCURSED TRIGANS IS BAD ENOUGH BUT APPOINTING THAT MOON-FACED BRAT AS HIS SUCCESSOR IS TOO MUCH!

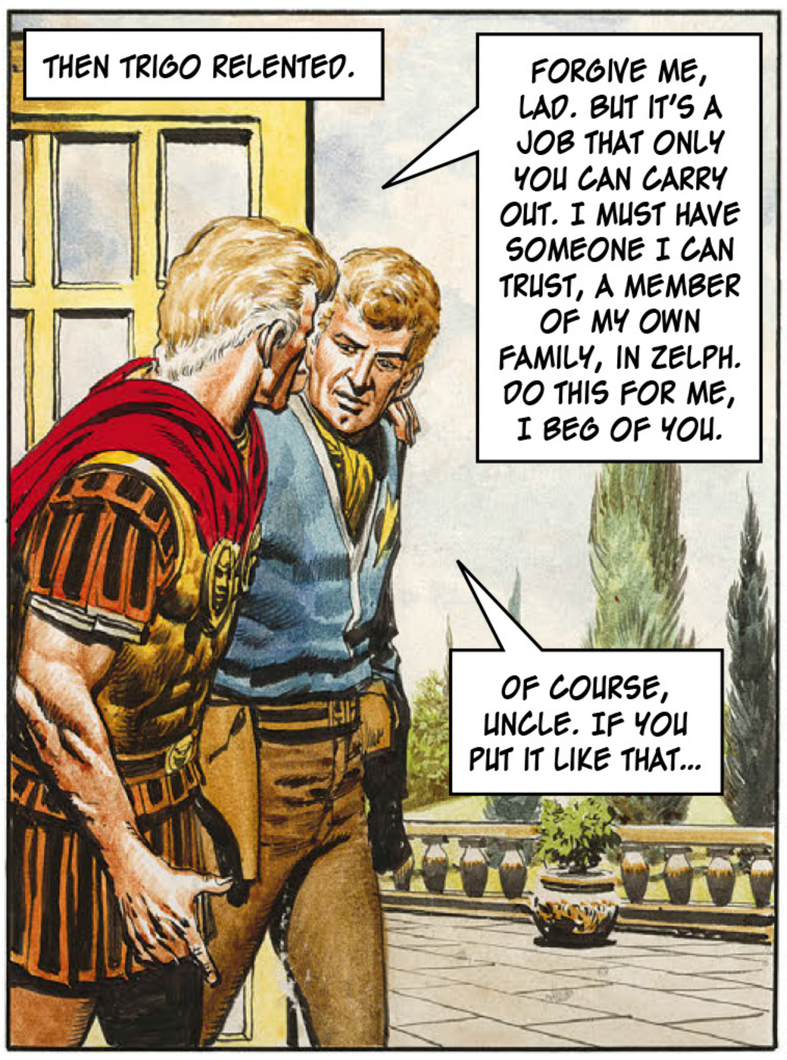
TO DAVELI WITH HARA – AND TRIGO TOO! I'LL BE KING OF ZELPH IF I HAVE TO DESTROY THE PAIR OF THEM!
A-A-AWWKK!

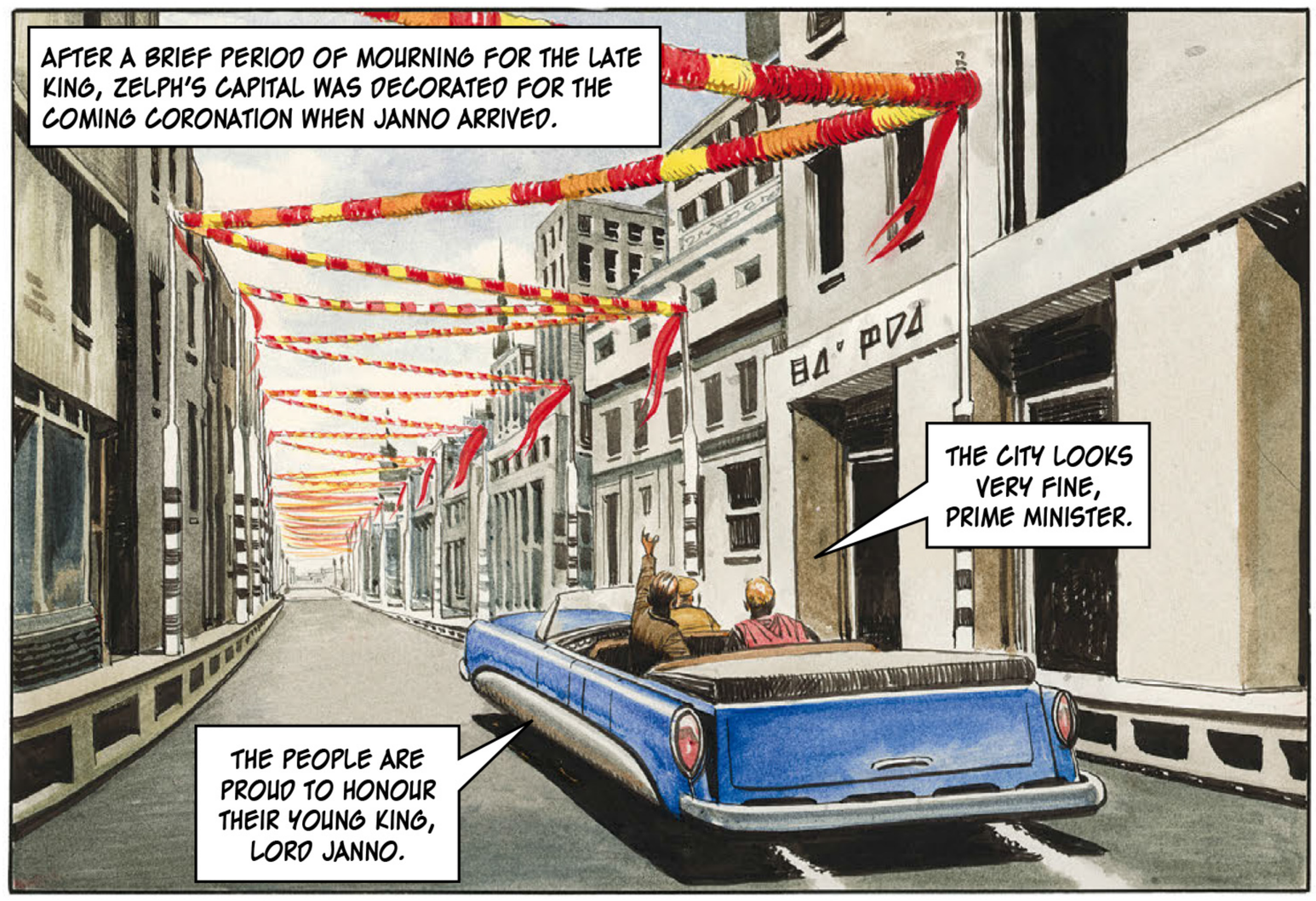

TWO LUNAR MONTHS LATER, THE TRIGAN FLEET-CARRIER VICTRA" WAS ON THE FIRST LEG OF A GLOBAL CRUISE. JANNO'S SQUADRON WAS BEING CARRIED ON THE GREAT VESSEL.
LIEUTENANT JANNO, REPORT TO THE CONTROL TOWER ON LANDING.
ACKNOWLEDGED!

SOME TIME LATER...
WHAT ROTTEN LUCK, JANNO. YOU'RE GOING TO MISS A MARVELLOUS CRUISE.
I'VE JUST HAD A SUMMONS FROM THE EMPEROR... I'M TO FLY HOME TO TRIGAN CITY IMMEDIATELY.
AND WE SHALL MISS YOU, TOO, OLD FRIEND.

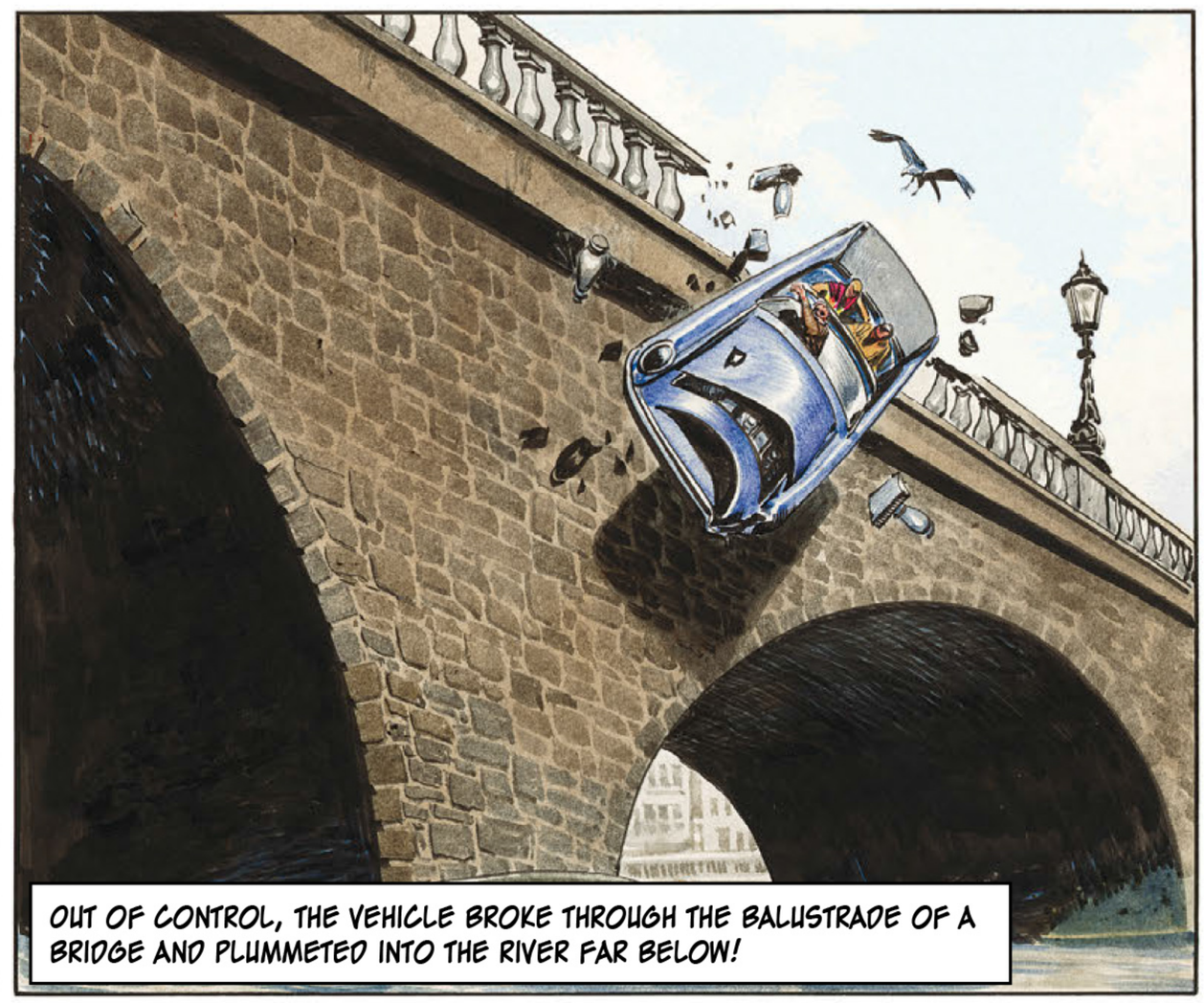
THE FOLLOWING DAY, JANNO WAS IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS UNCLE, THE EMPEROR.
KING DRAGO OF ZELPH HAS JUST DIED AND HIS YOUNG GRANDSON IS SUCCEEDING HIM. I WANT YOU, JANNO, TO REPRESENT ME AT HARA'S CORONATION AND TO REMAIN IN ZELPH AS MY SPECIAL AMBASSADOR TO KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS.

JANNO PROTESTED – AND RECEIVED THE FULL FORCE OF THE IMPERIAL WRATH!
I DON'T WANT TO BE AN AMBASSADOR! I WANT TO GO BACK TO MY SQUADRON AND...
DON'T TELL ME WHAT YOU DO OR DON'T WANT! NOT UNLESS YOU WANT TO SPEND THE REST OF YOUR DAYS SLAVING IN THE MINES!


THEN TRIGO RELENTED.
FORGIVE ME, LAD. BUT IT'S A JOB THAT ONLY YOU CAN CARRY OUT. I MUST HAVE SOMEONE I CAN TRUST, A MEMBER OF MY OWN FAMILY, IN ZELPH. DO THIS FOR ME, I BEG OF YOU.
OF COURSE, UNCLE. IF YOU PUT IT LIKE THAT...

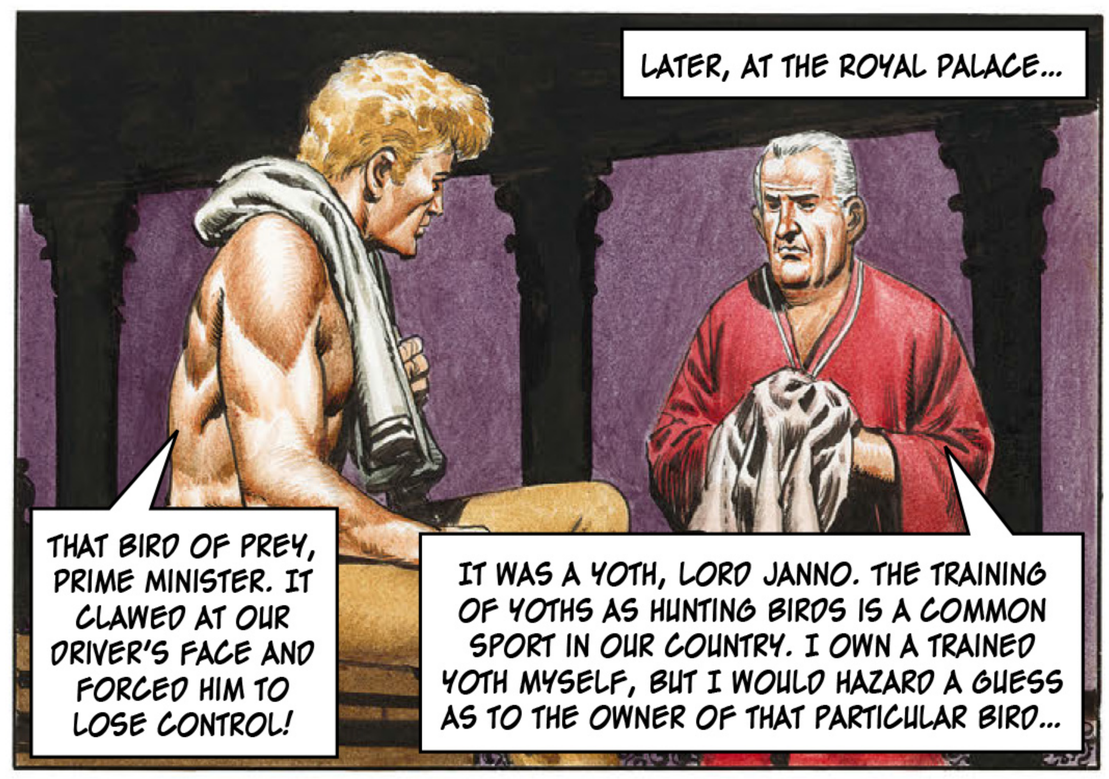

AFTER A BRIEF PERIOD OF MOURNING FOR THE LATE KING, ZELPH'S CAPITAL WAS DECORATED FOR THE COMING CORONATION WHEN JANNO ARRIVED.
THE CITY LOOKS VERY FINE, PRIME MINISTER.
THE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO HONOUR THEIR YOUNG KING, LORD JANNO.

SUDDENLY – IT HAPPENED! A BEATING OF WINGS, AN ANGRY SQUAWK, AND THE DRIVER CLUTCHED AT HIS LACERATED FACE!
A-A-AWWKK!
EEEEAAAH!

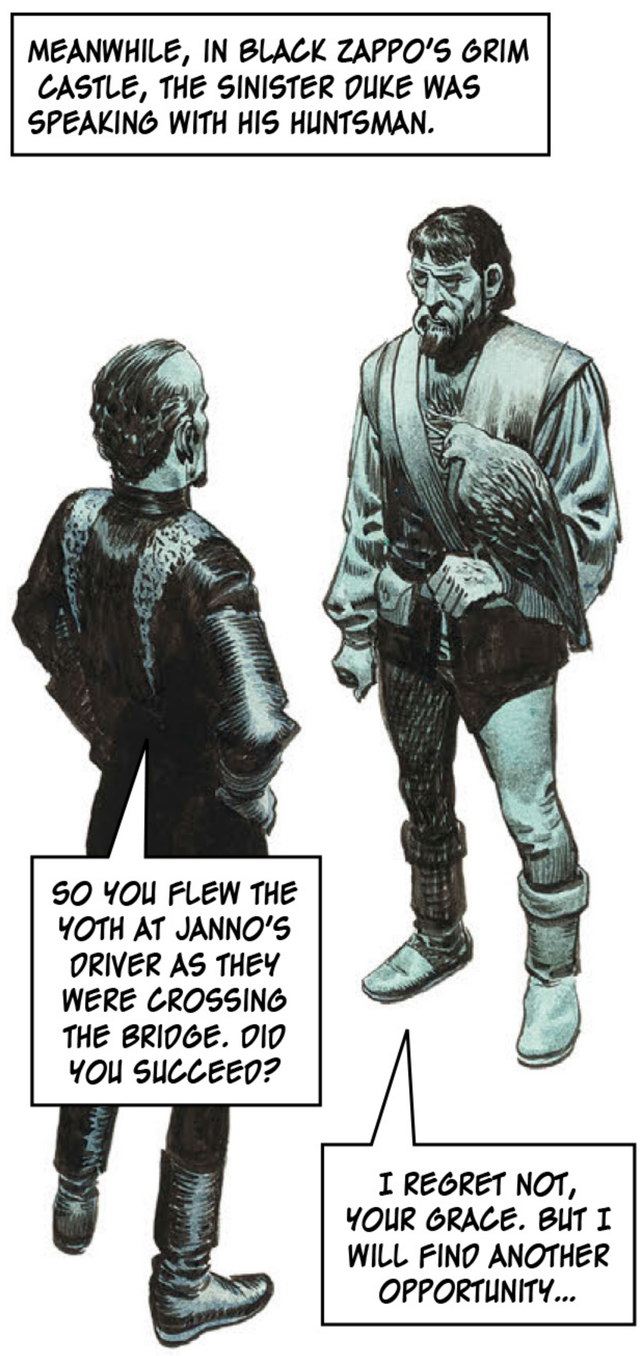

OUT OF CONTROL, THE VEHICLE BROKE THROUGH THE BALUSTRADE OF A BRIDGE AND PLUMMETED INTO THE RIVER FAR BELOW!

WITH LUNGS AT BURSTING POINT, JANNO KICKED FOR THE SURFACE.
CAN I MAKE IT...? CAN I...?

HIS HEAD EMERGED INTO THE SUNLIGHT.
LORD JANNO! THANK THE STARS THAT YOU ARE SAFE!
PRIME MINISTER!

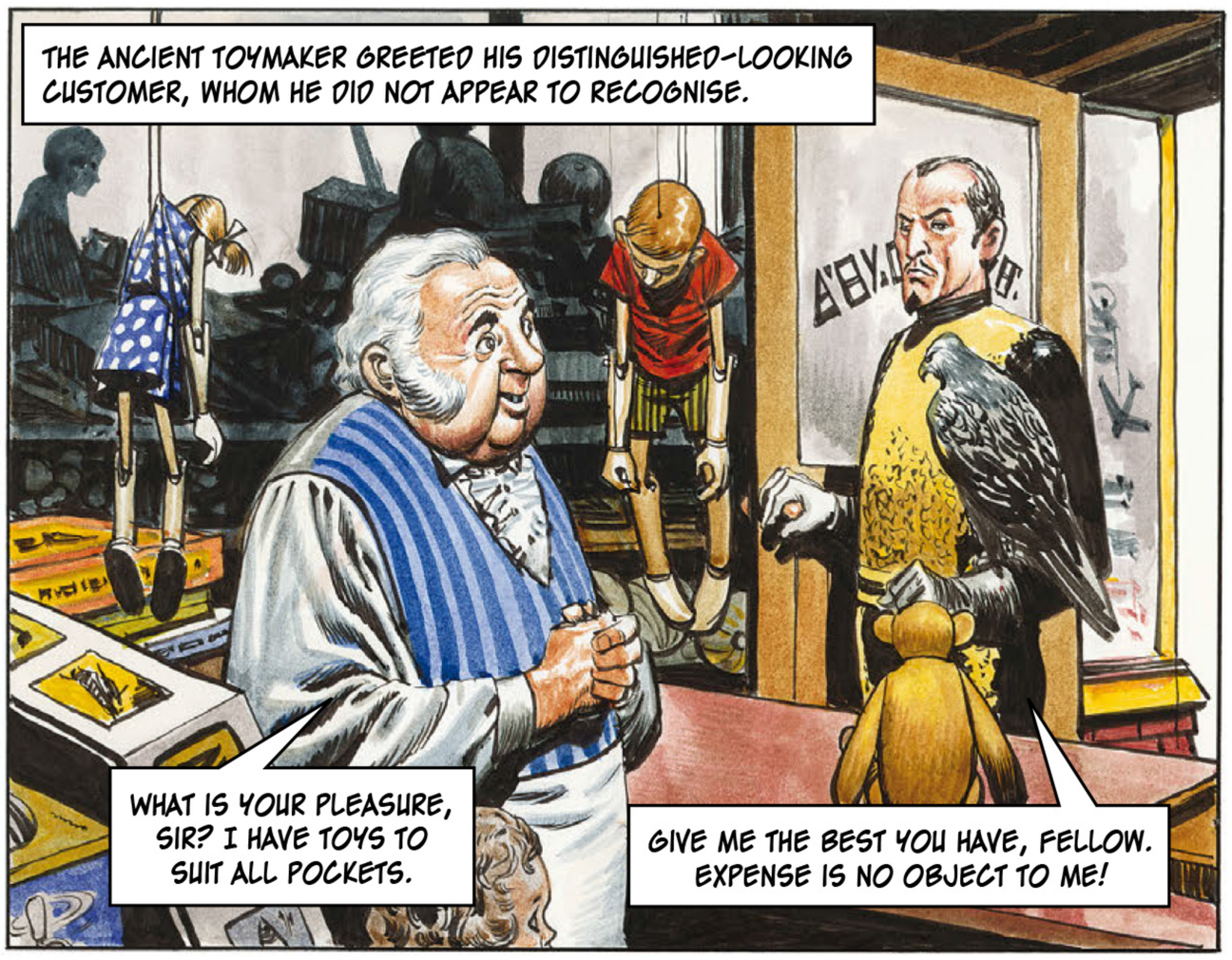

LATER, AT THE ROYAL PALACE...
THAT BIRD OF PREY, PRIME MINISTER. IT CLAWED AT OUR DRIVER'S FACE AND FORCED HIM TO LOSE CONTROL!
IT WAS A YOTH, LORD JANNO. THE TRAINING OF YOTHS AS HUNTING BIRDS IS A COMMON SPORT IN OUR COUNTRY. I OWN A TRAINED YOTH MYSELF, BUT I WOULD HAZARD A GUESS AS TO THE OWNER OF THAT PARTICULAR BIRD...

ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME THAT ATTACK WAS DELIBERATE? THEN WHO...?
THE DUKE OF ZELPH, LORD JANNO. THE ROGUE KNOWN AS BLACK ZAPPO! I THINK HE TRIED TO KILL YOU TODAY!


MEANWHILE, IN BLACK ZAPPO'S GRIM CASTLE, THE SINISTER DUKE WAS SPEAKING WITH HIS HUNTSMAN.
SO YOU FLEW THE YOTH AT JANNO'S DRIVER AS THEY WERE CROSSING THE BRIDGE. DID YOU SUCCEED?
I REGRET NOT, YOUR GRACE. BUT I WILL FIND ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY...

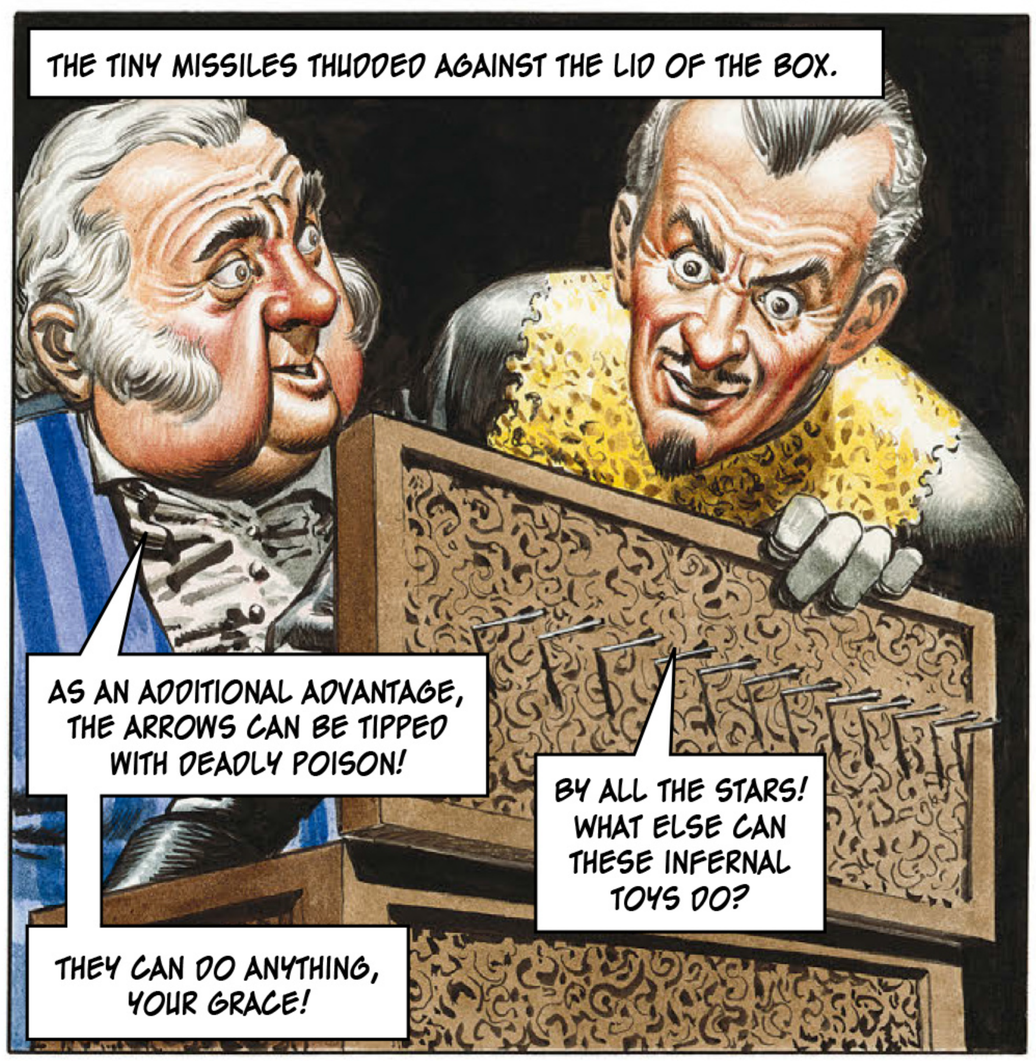
NO! I SHALL HAVE TO TRY OTHER MEANS TO GET RID OF THAT ACCURSED TRIGAN. TONIGHT I HAVE TO GO TO A RECEPTION IN HIS HONOUR AT THE PALACE. PERHAPS SOMETHING WILL OCCUR TO ME WHILE I AM THERE.

THAT NIGHT, WHILE BEING BORNE TOWARDS THE PALACE, BLACK ZAPPO PASSED AN OLD TOYSHOP...
A TOYSHOP! THAT REMINDS ME... I OUGHT TO TAKE A PRESENT FOR THAT MOON-FACED BRAT WHO WILL SHORTLY BE WEARING THE CROWN THAT, BY RIGHTS, SHOULD BE MINE!
STOP HERE AND PUT ME DOWN!


THE ANCIENT TOYMAKER GREETED HIS DISTINGUISHED-LOOKING CUSTOMER, WHOM HE DID NOT APPEAR TO RECOGNISE.
WHAT IS YOUR PLEASURE, SIR? I HAVE TOYS TO SUIT ALL POCKETS.
GIVE ME THE BEST YOU HAVE, FELLOW. EXPENSE IS NO OBJECT TO ME!

A STRANGE CHANGE CAME OVER THE OLD TOYMAKER AS HE PRODUCED A CARVED BOX.
TOY SOLDIERS? WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT A BOX OF ORDINARY TOY SOLDIERS?
AAAH! FOR A PRINCELY GENTLEMAN SUCH AS YOURSELF, SIR, I WOULD RECOMMEND THESE...

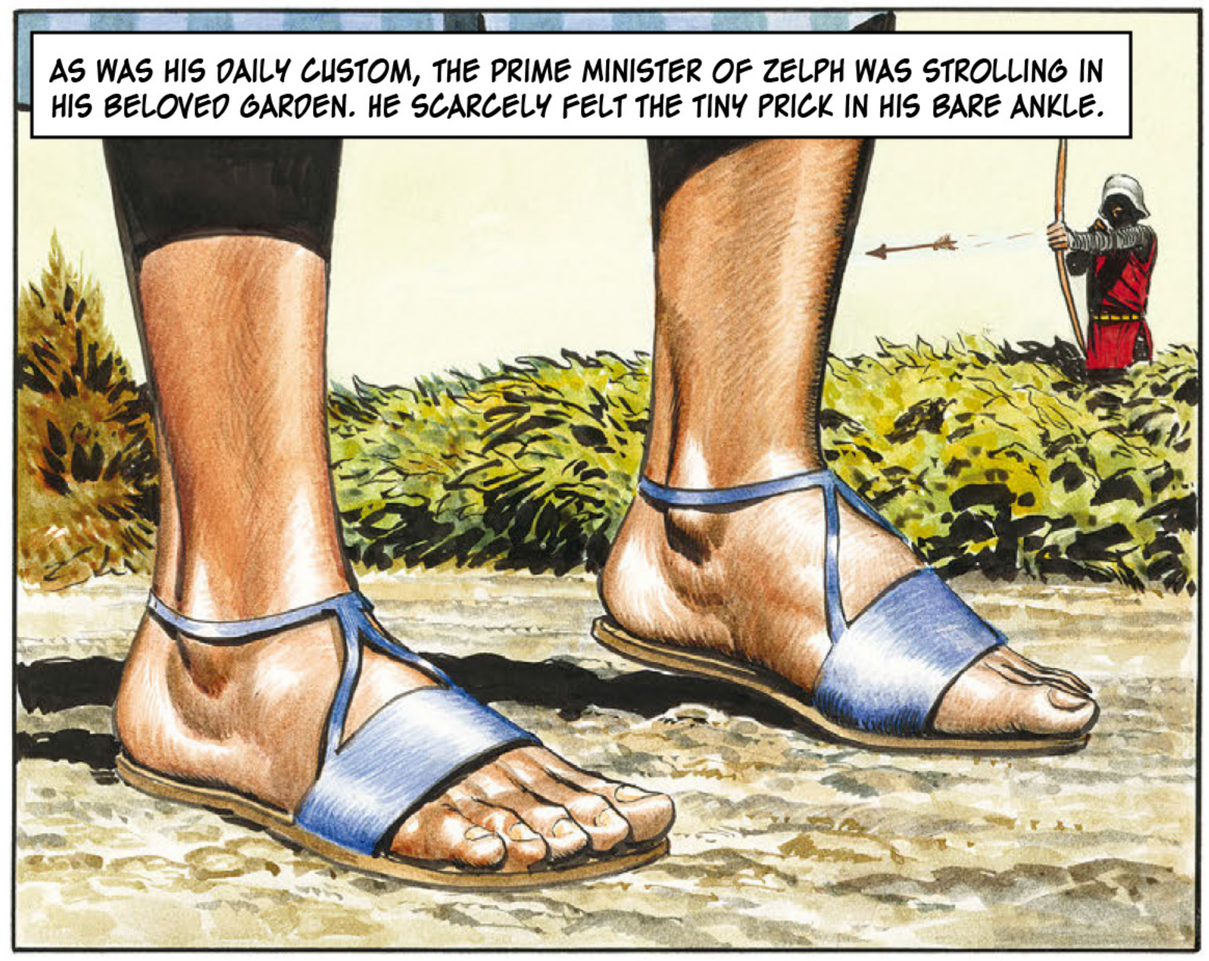
FOR ANSWER, THE OLD MAN RASPED OUT A CURT ORDER!
READY YOUR BOWS! TAKE AIM...! FIRE!
BY ALL THE DEMONS IN DAVELI... ARE THEY ALIVE?


THE TINY MISSILES THUDDED AGAINST THE LID OF THE BOX.
AS AN ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGE, THE ARROWS CAN BE TIPPED WITH DEADLY POISON!
BY ALL THE STARS! WHAT ELSE CAN THESE INFERNAL TOYS DO?
THEY CAN DO ANYTHING, YOUR GRACE!

LATER, AT THE RECEPTION, JANNO WATCHED THE NOTORIOUS BLACK ZAPPO GIVING A PRESENT TO HIS YOUNG KINSMAN.
THANK YOU, YOUR GRACE.
SO THAT IS THE MAN YOU SUSPECT OF TRYING TO KILL ME!
TO GAIN THE CROWN OF ZELPH HE WOULD DESTROY US ALL, MY LORD!

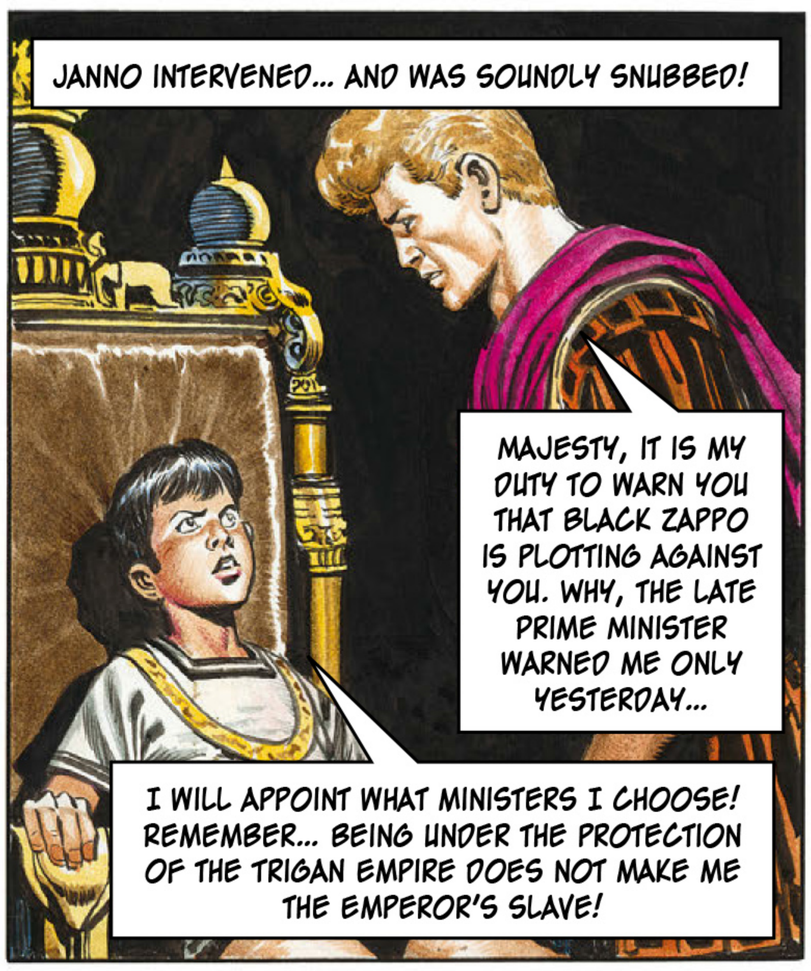
THAT NIGHT, WHILE THE BOY-KING SLEPT, THE LID OF THE TOYBOX CREAKED OPEN...

IN THE MORNING, A FIGURE LURKING BEHIND SOME UNDERGROWTH AIMED A BOW...

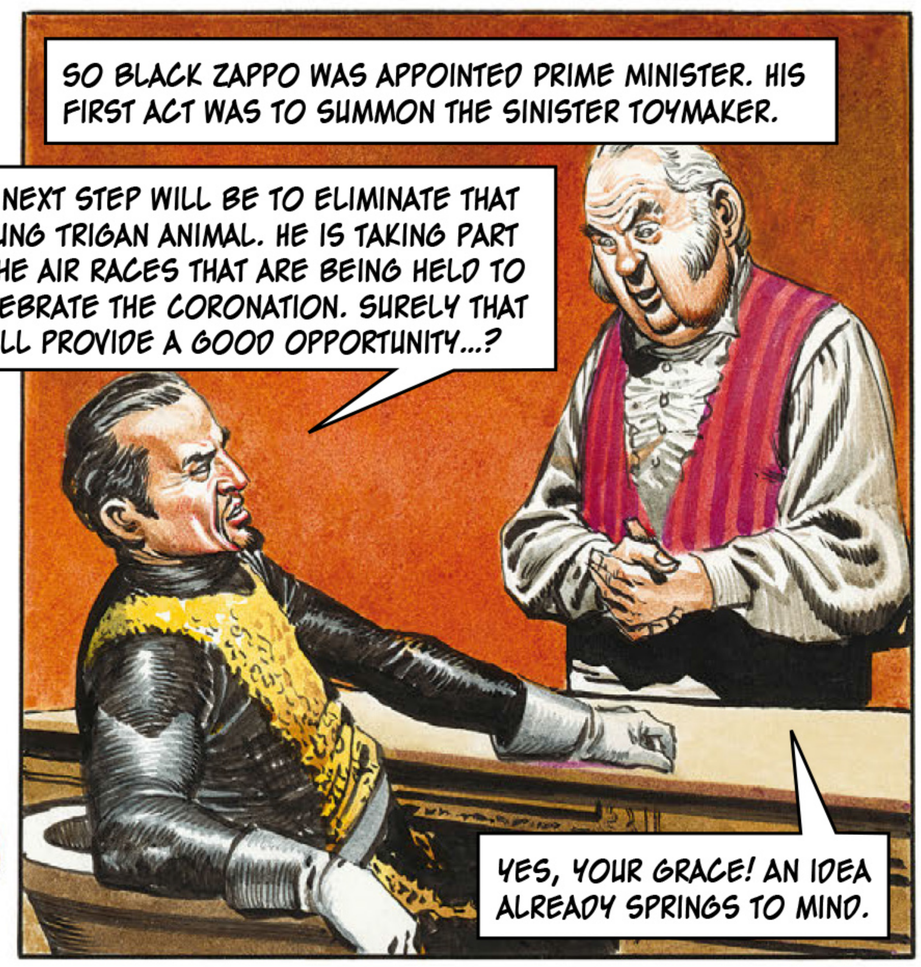

AS WAS HIS DAILY CUSTOM, THE PRIME MINISTER OF ZELPH WAS STROLLING IN HIS BELOVED GARDEN. HE SCARCELY FELT THE TINY PRICK IN HIS BARE ANKLE.

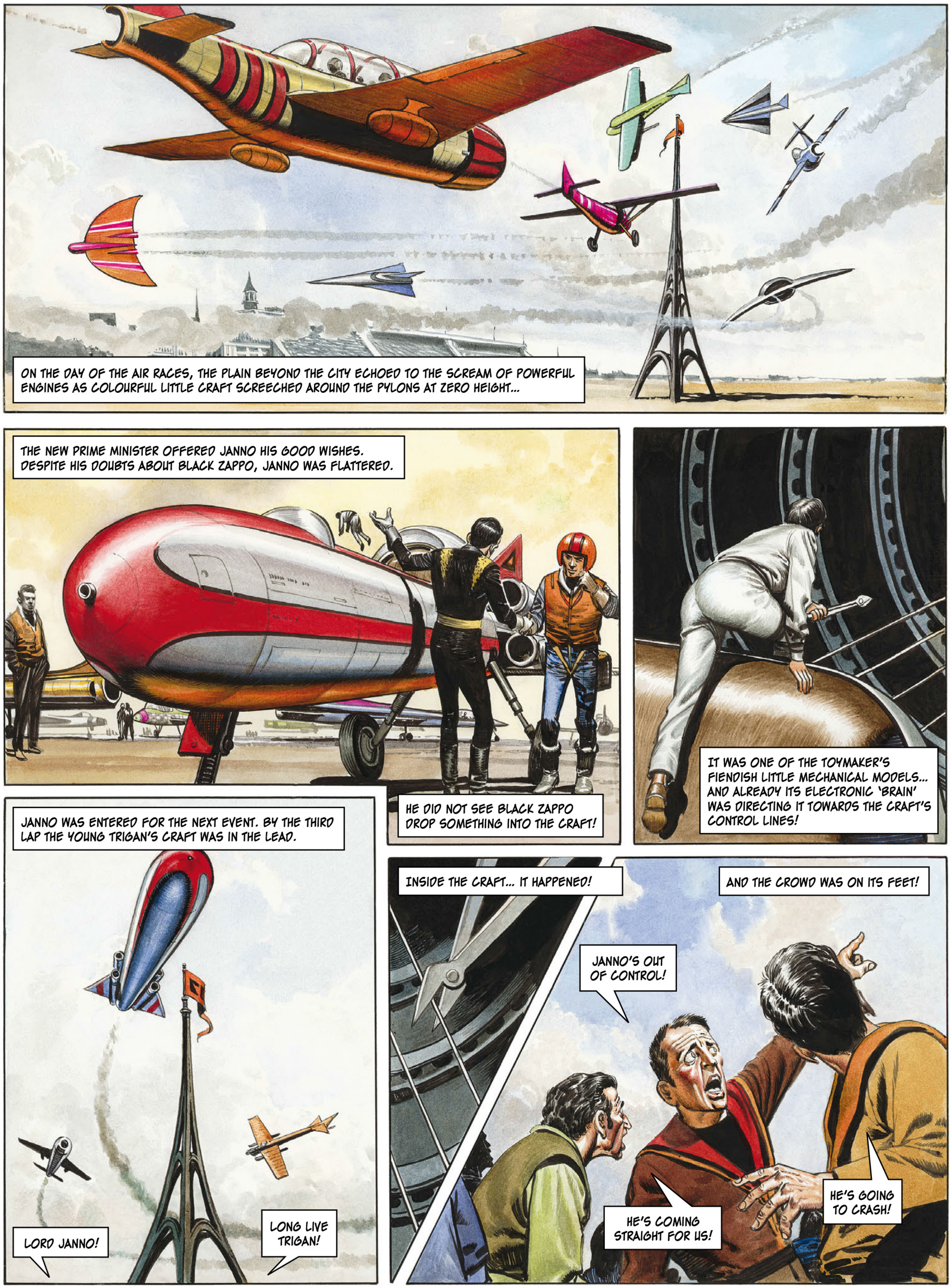
MASTER! NO! IT CAN'T BE...!
A SHORT WHILE LATER, A SERVANT, SUMMONING HIS MASTER FOR BREAKFAST, MADE THE HORRIFYING DISCOVERY!

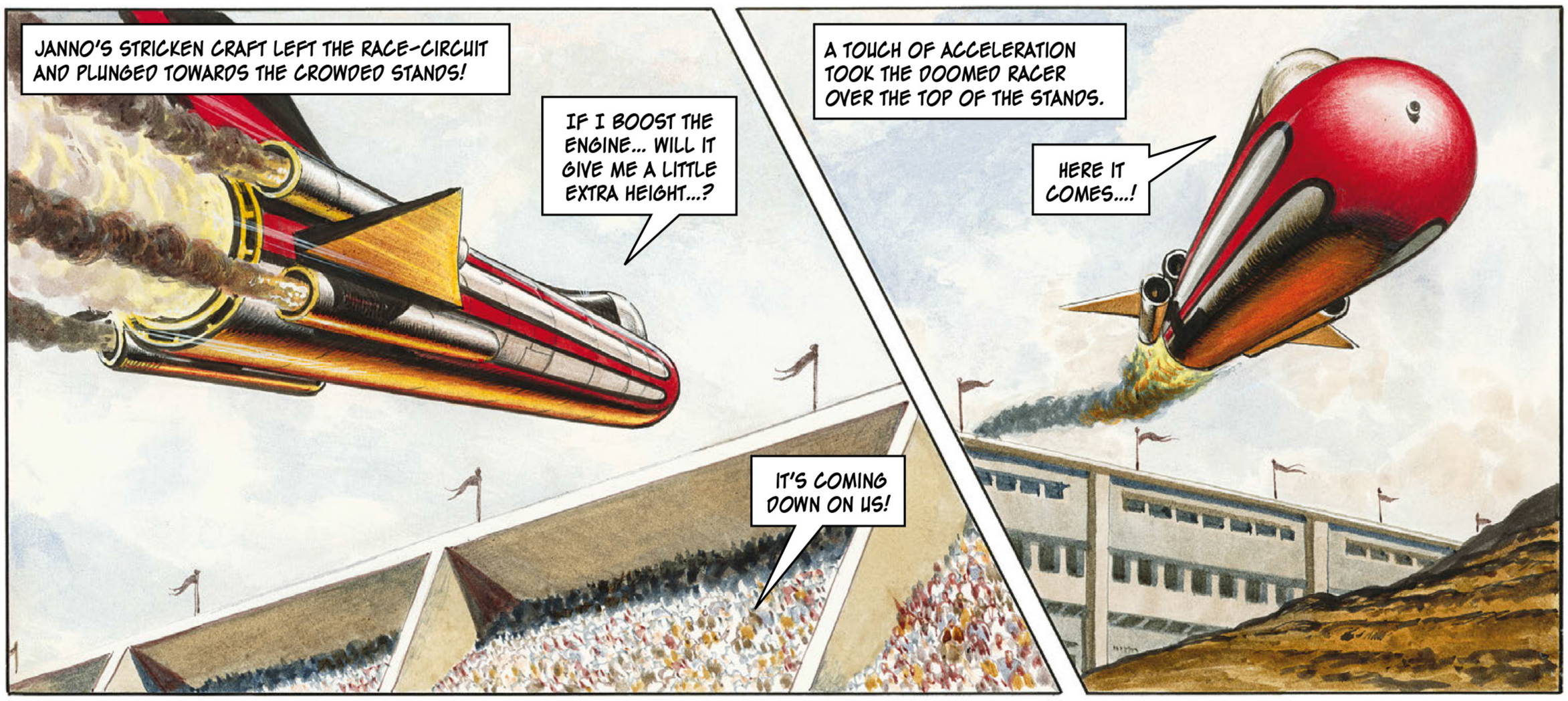
JANNO WAS WITH THE BOY KING AND HIS COUNCIL WHEN THE TRAGIC NEWS WAS BROUGHT.
I DON'T WANT YOU, FATTY! I WANT THE DUKE, ZAPPO!
MAJESTY! THE SUDDEN AND MYSTERIOUS DEMISE OF YOUR PRINCIPAL MINISTER MEANS THAT HIS SUCCESSOR MUST BE APPOINTED IMMEDIATELY. I, MYSELF, WOULD COUNT IT AN HONOUR TO BE...

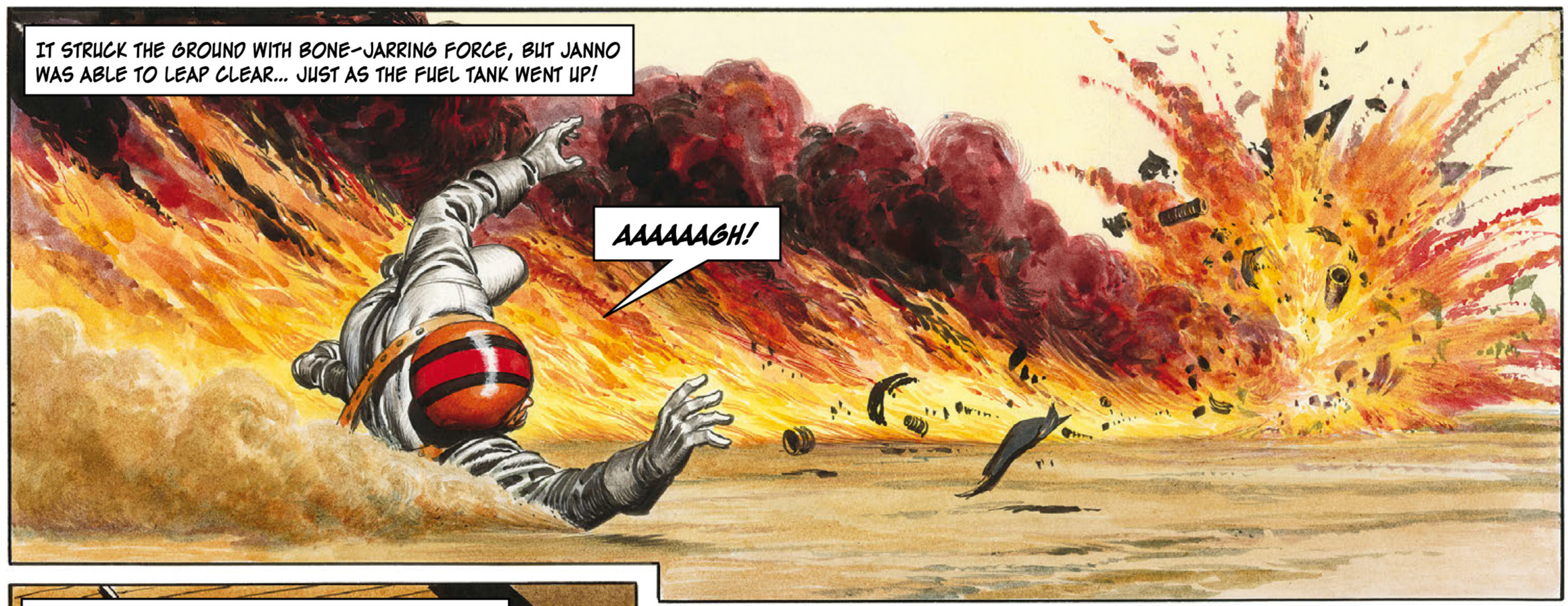

JANNO INTERVENED... AND WAS SOUNDLY SNUBBED!
MAJESTY, IT IS MY DUTY TO WARN YOU THAT BLACK ZAPPO IS PLOTTING AGAINST YOU. WHY, THE LATE PRIME MINISTER WARNED ME ONLY YESTERDAY...
I WILL APPOINT WHAT MINISTERS I CHOOSE! REMEMBER... BEING UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE DOES NOT MAKE ME THE EMPEROR'S SLAVE!

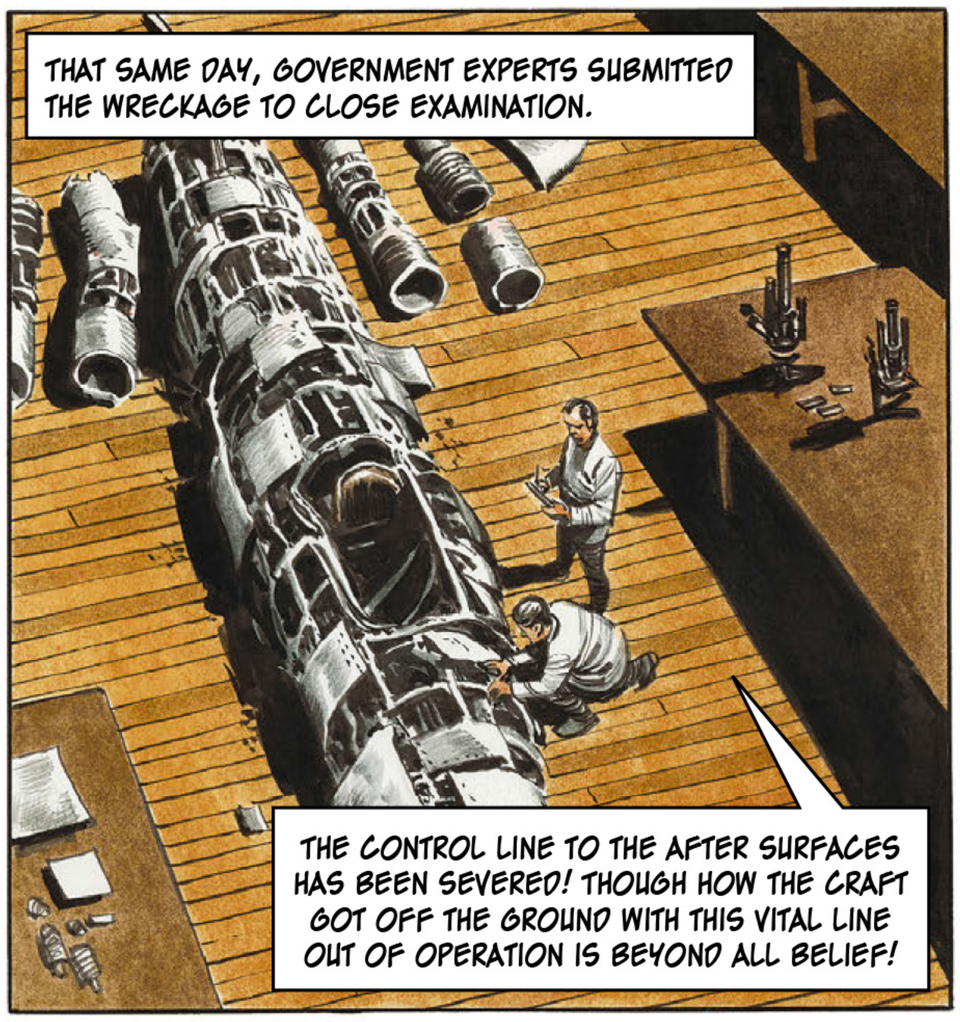
HE'S CERTAINLY STRONG-WILLED FOR A YOUNGSTER... AND HE KNOWS ALL THE ANSWERS!

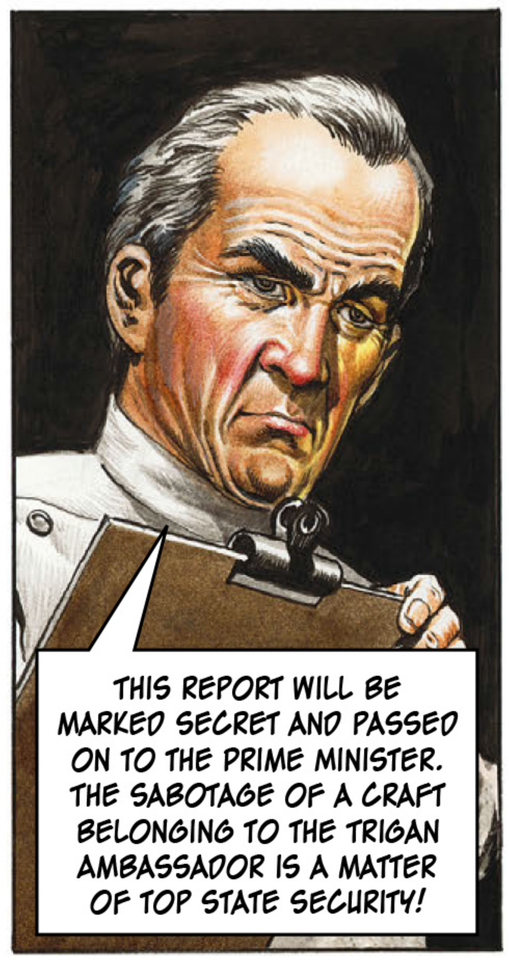

SO BLACK ZAPPO WAS APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER. HIS FIRST ACT WAS TO SUMMON THE SINISTER TOYMAKER.
MY NEXT STEP WILL BE TO ELIMINATE THAT YOUNG TRIGAN ANIMAL. HE IS TAKING PART IN THE AIR RACES THAT ARE BEING HELD TO CELEBRATE THE CORONATION. SURELY THAT WILL PROVIDE A GOOD OPPORTUNITY...?
YES, YOUR GRACE! AN IDEA ALREADY SPRINGS TO MIND.


ON THE DAY OF THE AIR RACES, THE PLAIN BEYOND THE CITY ECHOED TO THE SCREAM OF POWERFUL ENGINES AS COLOURFUL LITTLE CRAFT SCREECHED AROUND THE PYLONS AT ZERO HEIGHT...
THE NEW PRIME MINISTER OFFERED JANNO HIS GOOD WISHES. DESPITE HIS DOUBTS ABOUT BLACK ZAPPO, JANNO WAS FLATTERED.
HE DID NOT SEE BLACK ZAPPO DROP SOMETHING INTO THE CRAFT!
IT WAS ONE OF THE TOYMAKER'S FIENDISH LITTLE MECHANICAL MODELS... AND ALREADY ITS ELECTRONIC 'BRAIN' WAS DIRECTING IT TOWARDS THE CRAFT'S CONTROL LINES!
JANNO WAS ENTERED FOR THE NEXT EVENT. BY THE THIRD LAP THE YOUNG TRIGAN'S CRAFT WAS IN THE LEAD.
LORD JANNO!
LONG LIVE TRIGAN!
INSIDE THE CRAFT... IT HAPPENED!
AND THE CROWD WAS ON ITS FEET!
JANNO'S OUT OF CONTROL!
HE'S COMING STRAIGHT FOR US!
HE'S GOING TO CRASH!

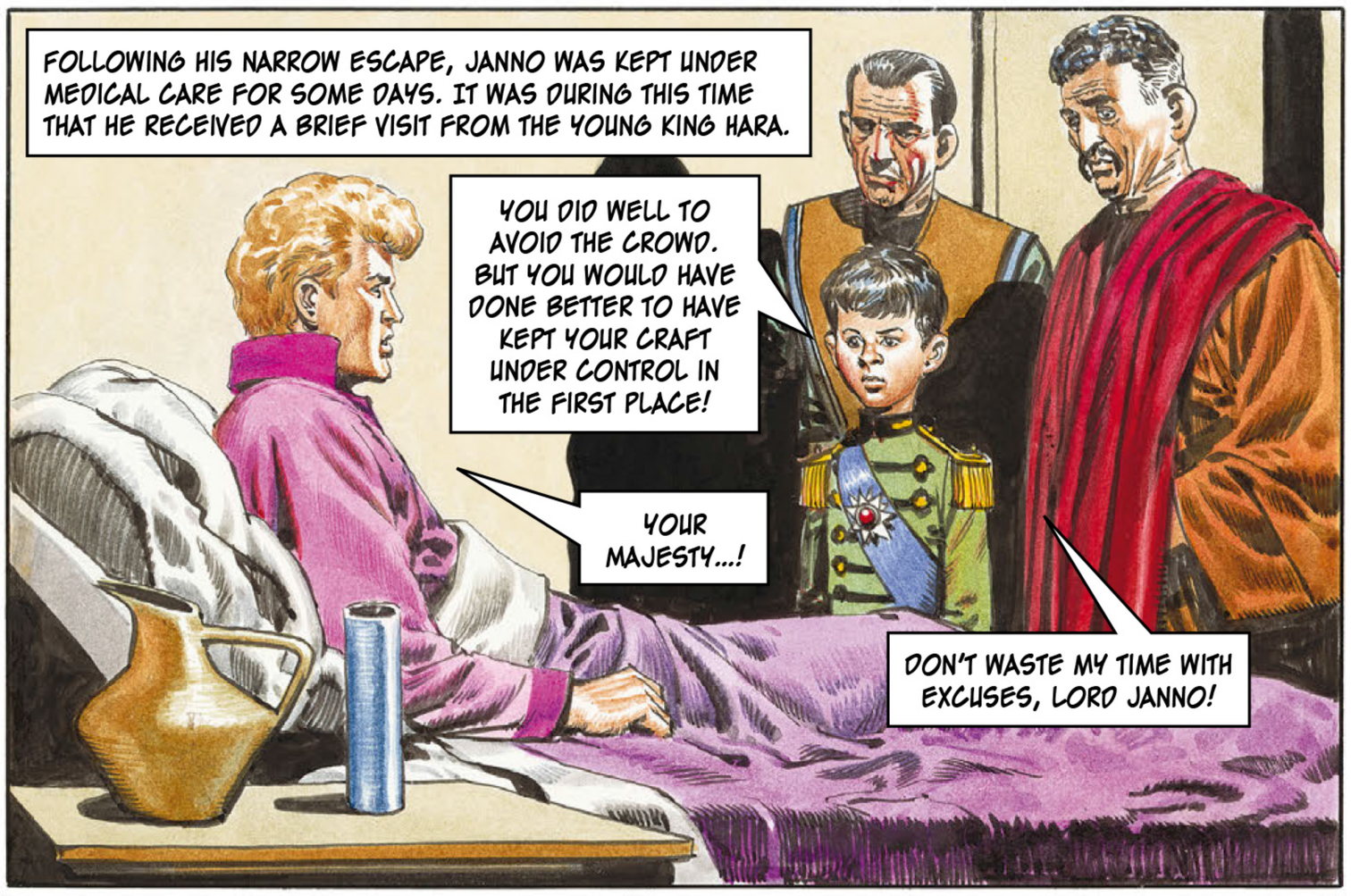

JANNO'S STRICKEN CRAFT LEFT THE RACE-CIRCUIT AND PLUNGED TOWARDS THE CROWDED STANDS!
IF I BOOST THE ENGINE... WILL IT GIVE ME A LITTLE EXTRA HEIGHT...?
IT'S COMING DOWN ON US!
A TOUCH OF ACCELERATION TOOK THE DOOMED RACER OVER THE TOP OF THE STANDS.
HERE IT COMES...!

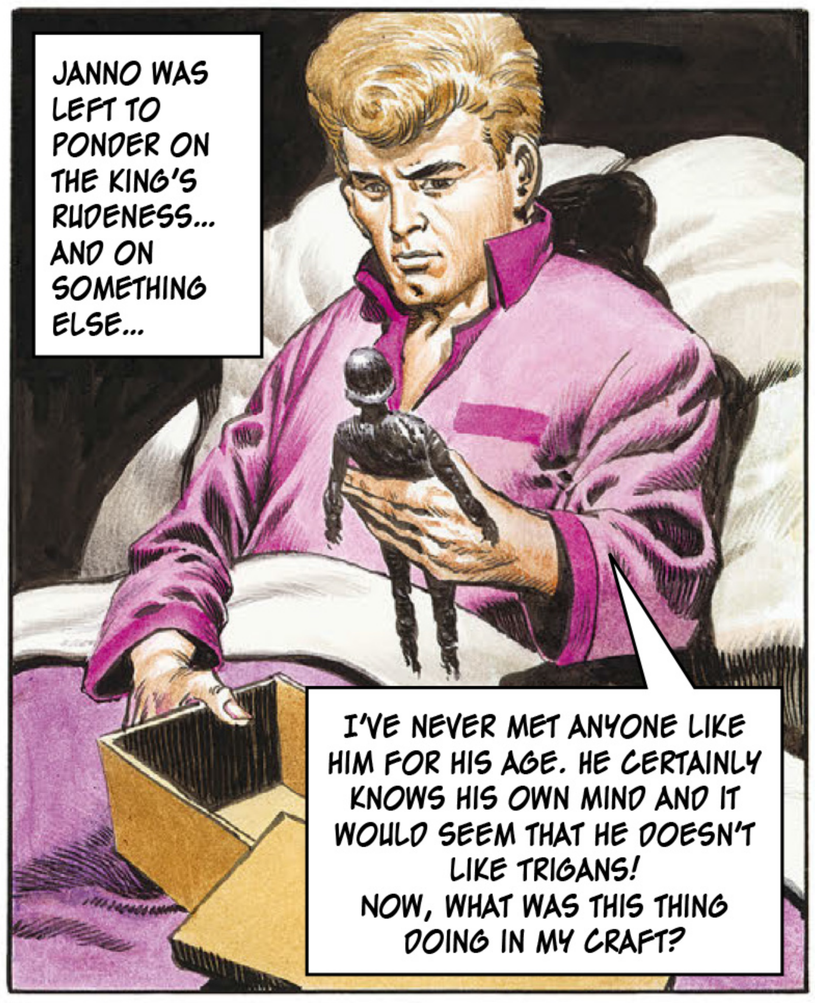

IT STRUCK THE GROUND WITH BONE-JARRING FORCE, BUT JANNO WAS ABLE TO LEAP CLEAR... JUST AS THE FUEL TANK WENT UP!
AAAAAAGH!


THAT SAME DAY, GOVERNMENT EXPERTS SUBMITTED THE WRECKAGE TO CLOSE EXAMINATION.
THE CONTROL LINE TO THE AFTER SURFACES HAS BEEN SEVERED! THOUGH HOW THE CRAFT GOT OFF THE GROUND WITH THIS VITAL LINE OUT OF OPERATION IS BEYOND ALL BELIEF!


THIS REPORT WILL BE MARKED SECRET AND PASSED ON TO THE PRIME MINISTER. THE SABOTAGE OF A CRAFT BELONGING TO THE TRIGAN AMBASSADOR IS A MATTER OF TOP STATE SECURITY!

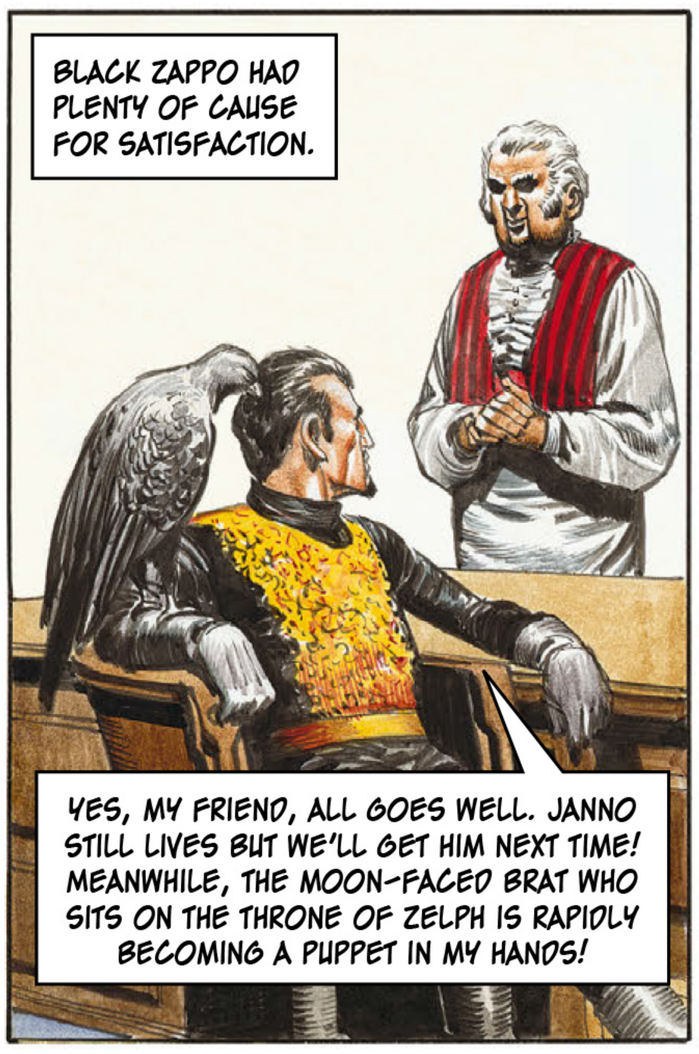
THIS WAS IN THE WRECKAGE - SOME SORT OF DOLL.
PROBABLY LORD JANNO'S GOOD-LUCK MASCOT. YOU KNOW WHAT THESE FLYERS ARE LIKE! HAVE IT SENT TO HIM.


FOLLOWING HIS NARROW ESCAPE, JANNO WAS KEPT UNDER MEDICAL CARE FOR SOME DAYS. IT WAS DURING THIS TIME THAT HE RECEIVED A BRIEF VISIT FROM THE YOUNG KING HARA.
YOU DID WELL TO AVOID THE CROWD. BUT YOU WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER TO HAVE KEPT YOUR CRAFT UNDER CONTROL IN THE FIRST PLACE!
YOUR MAJESTY...!
DON'T WASTE MY TIME WITH EXCUSES, LORD JANNO!

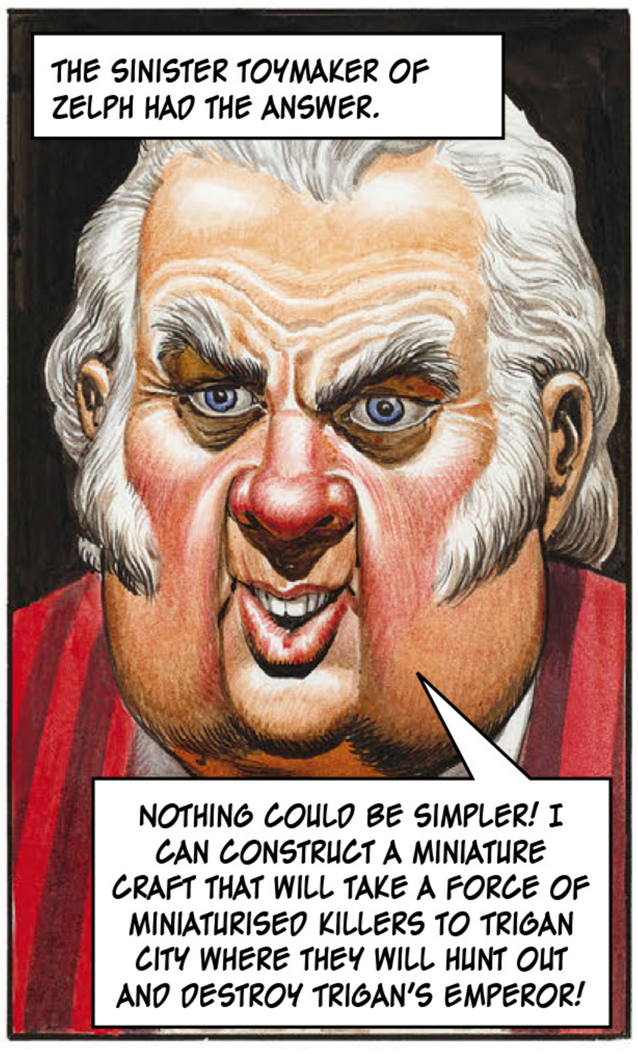

JANNO WAS LEFT TO PONDER ON THE KING'S RUDENESS... AND ON SOMETHING ELSE...
I'VE NEVER MET ANYONE LIKE HIM FOR HIS AGE. HE CERTAINLY KNOWS HIS OWN MIND AND IT WOULD SEEM THAT HE DOESN'T LIKE TRIGANS! NOW, WHAT WAS THIS THING DOING IN MY CRAFT?

THAT NIGHT, WHILE KING HARA WAS ASLEEP...

HIS SLEEPING MIND WAS BOMBARDED WITH EVIL IDEAS!
REMEMBER THAT ALL TRIGANS ARE YOUR ENEMIES! HATE THEM WITH ALL YOUR HEART! PUT YOUR TRUST IN BLACK ZAPPO. HE WILL SET YOUR COUNTRY FREE...!


BLACK ZAPPO HAD PLENTY OF CAUSE FOR SATISFACTION.
YES, MY FRIEND, ALL GOES WELL. JANNO STILL LIVES BUT WE'LL GET HIM NEXT TIME! MEANWHILE, THE MOON-FACED BRAT WHO SITS ON THE THRONE OF ZELPH IS RAPIDLY BECOMING A PUPPET IN MY HANDS!

MY NEXT STEP WILL BE TO RENOUNCE TRIGO AS OVERLORD OF ZELPH THEN TAKE THE CROWN FOR MYSELF! AH - IF ONLY THERE WERE SOME WAY TO DISPOSE OF TRIGO!
BUT THERE IS, YOUR GRACE!


THE SINISTER TOYMAKER OF ZELPH HAD THE ANSWER.
NOTHING COULD BE SIMPLER! I CAN CONSTRUCT A MINIATURE CRAFT THAT WILL TAKE A FORCE OF MINIATURISED KILLERS TO TRIGAN CITY WHERE THEY WILL HUNT OUT AND DESTROY TRIGAN'S EMPEROR!

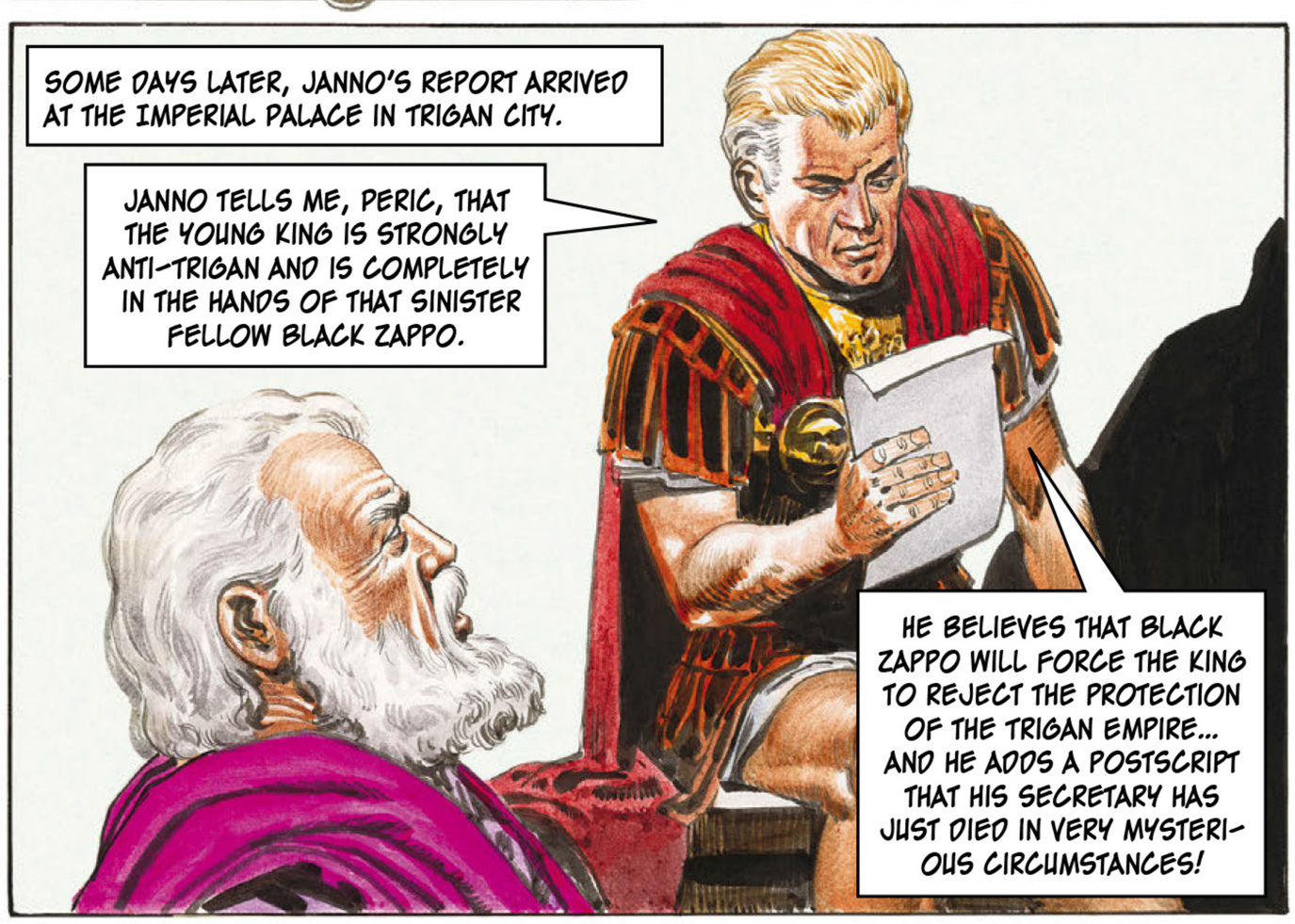
HARD AT WORK IN HIS ROOM IN THE TRIGAN EMBASSY, JANNO NEVER SAW THE PERIL OUTSIDE HIS WINDOW.

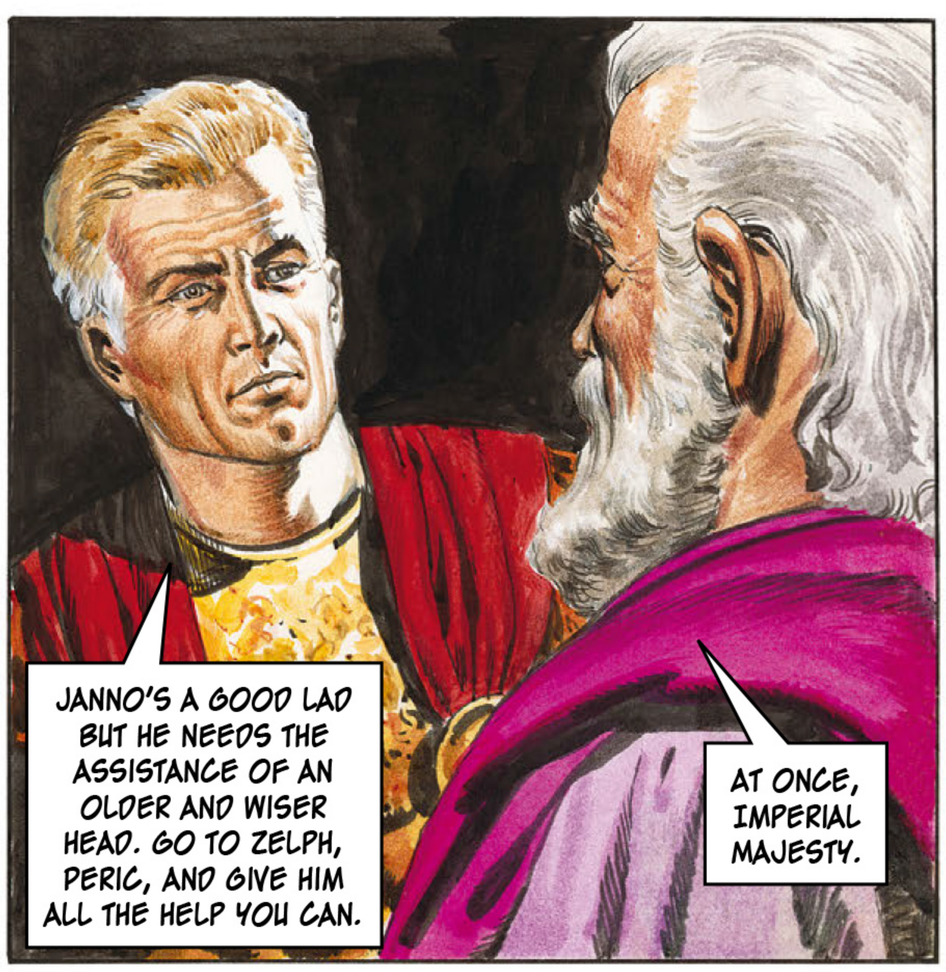
HE WAS SAVED BY THE ENTRANCE OF A SECRETARY.
HAVE THIS REPORT SENT IMMEDIATELY TO TRIGAN CITY ADDRESSED TO THE EMPEROR. I'M GOING OUT NOW.
YES, LORD JANNO.

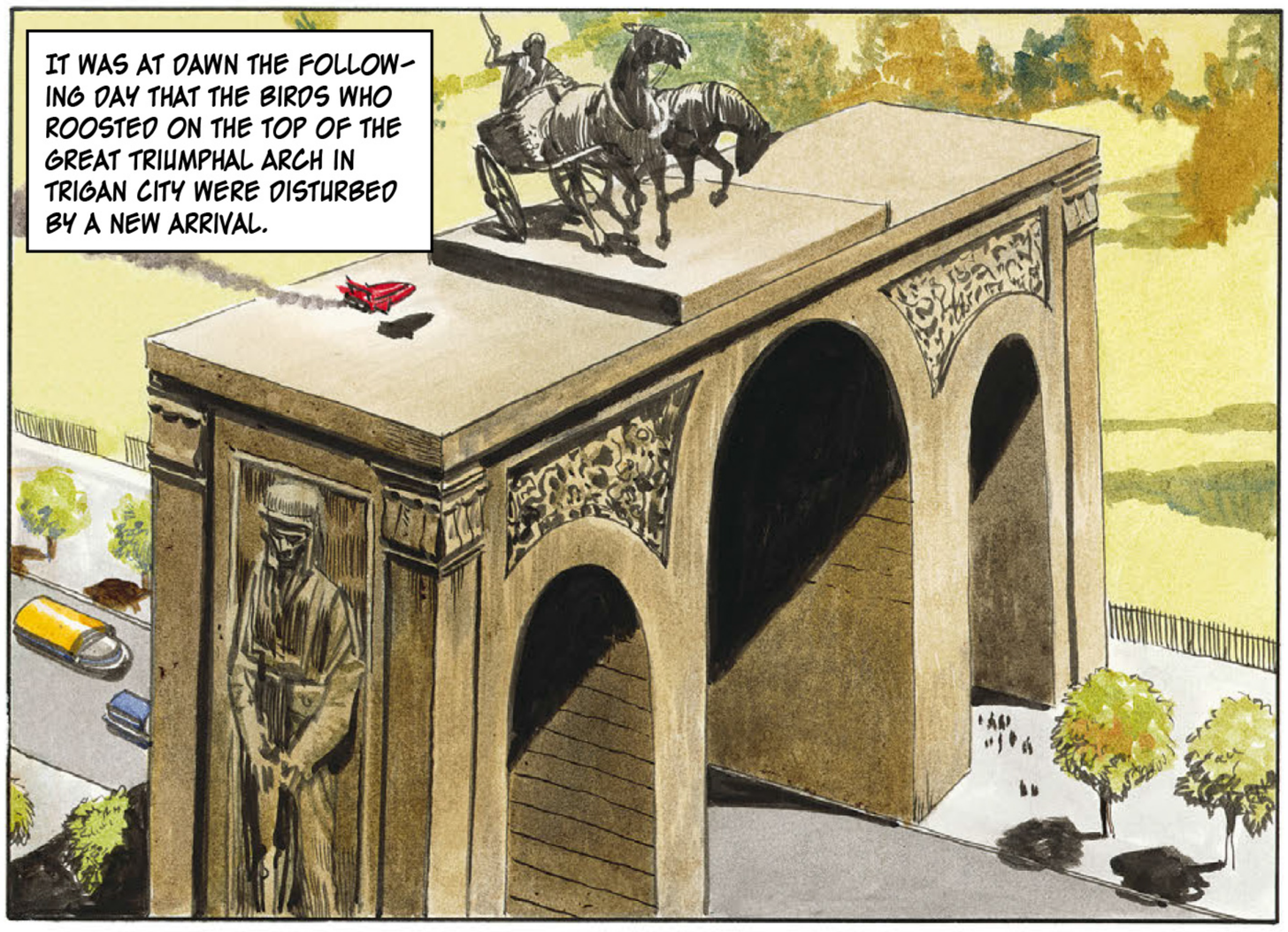
ALONE IN THE ROOM, THE SECRETARY NOTICED THE SLIGHT DRAUGHT FROM THE OPEN WINDOW. HE WENT TO SHUT IT, AND...
BY ALL THE DEMONS OF DAVELI!

THE BOY KING HARA OF ZELPH WAS ABOUT TO GO TO BED.
TCH! ONE OF MY SOLDIERS IS MISSING. BUT WHO COULD HAVE TAKEN IT? WHO WOULD HAVE DARED?

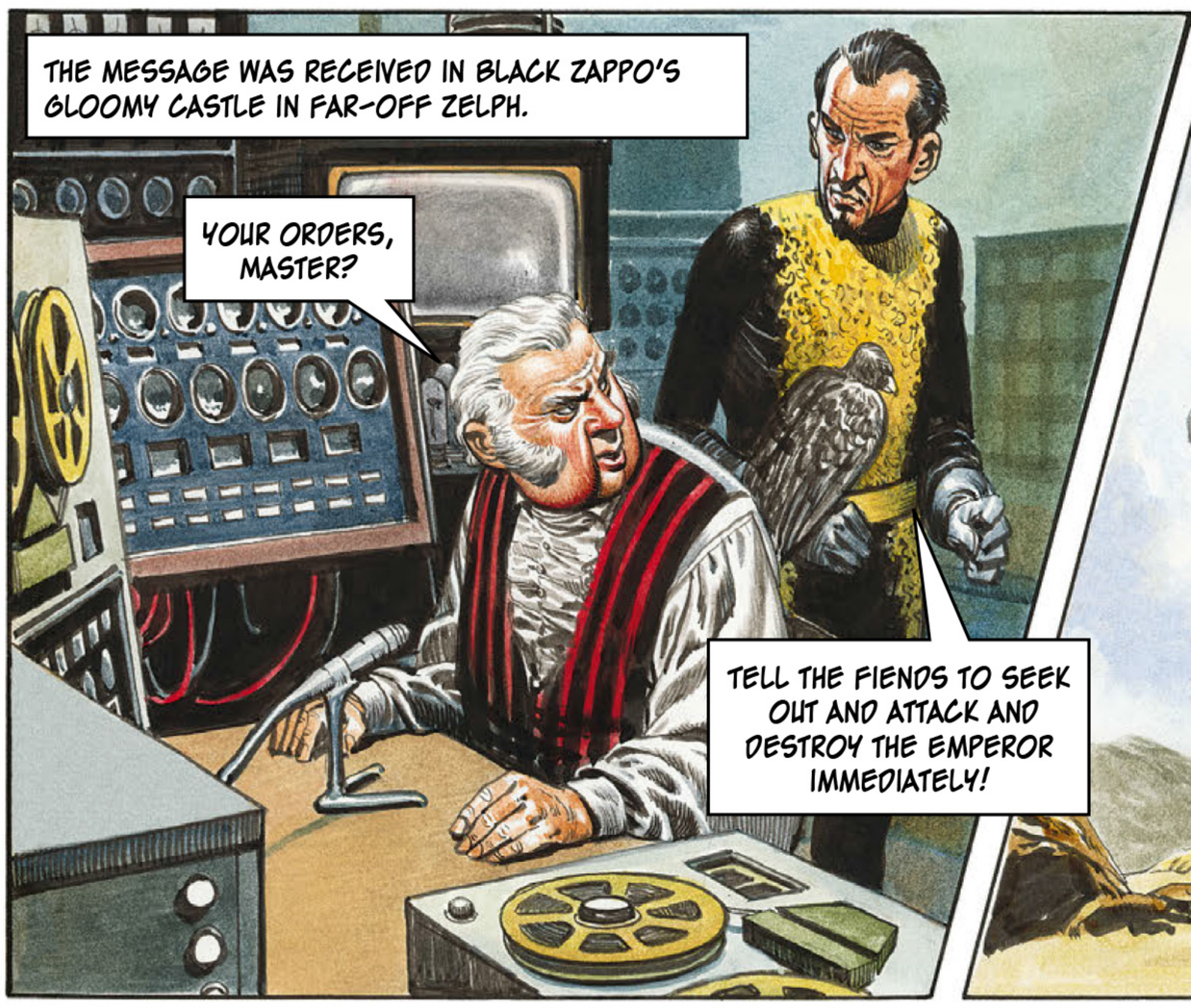
WHILE THE KING SLEPT, THE WANDERER RETURNED!

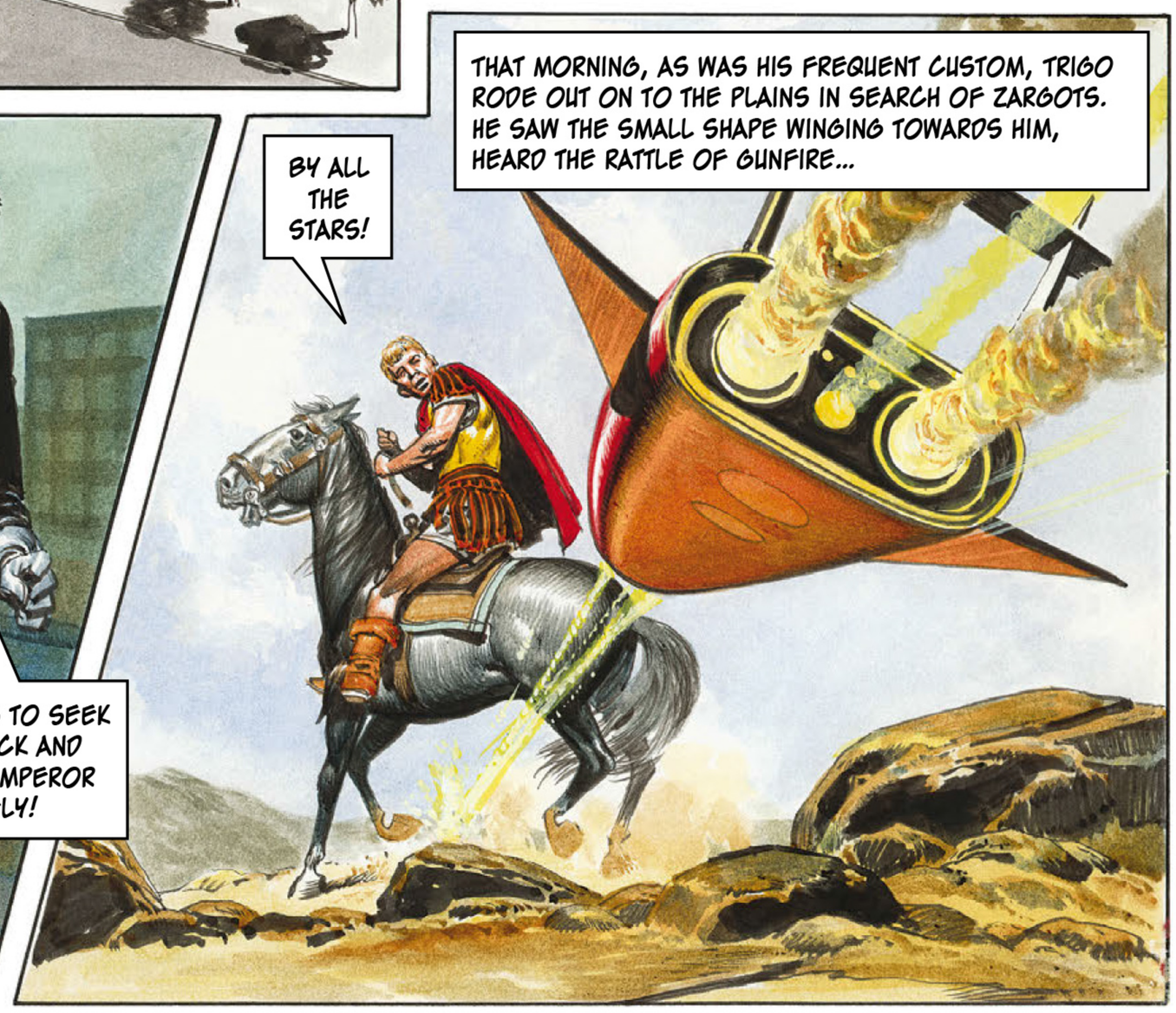

SOME DAYS LATER, JANNO'S REPORT ARRIVED AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE IN TRIGAN CITY.
JANNO TELLS ME, PERIC, THAT THE YOUNG KING IS STRONGLY ANTI-TRIGAN AND IS COMPLETELY IN THE HANDS OF THAT SINISTER FELLOW BLACK ZAPPO.
HE BELIEVES THAT BLACK ZAPPO WILL FORCE THE KING TO REJECT THE PROTECTION OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE... AND HE ADDS A POSTSCRIPT THAT HIS SECRETARY HAS JUST DIED IN VERY MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES!

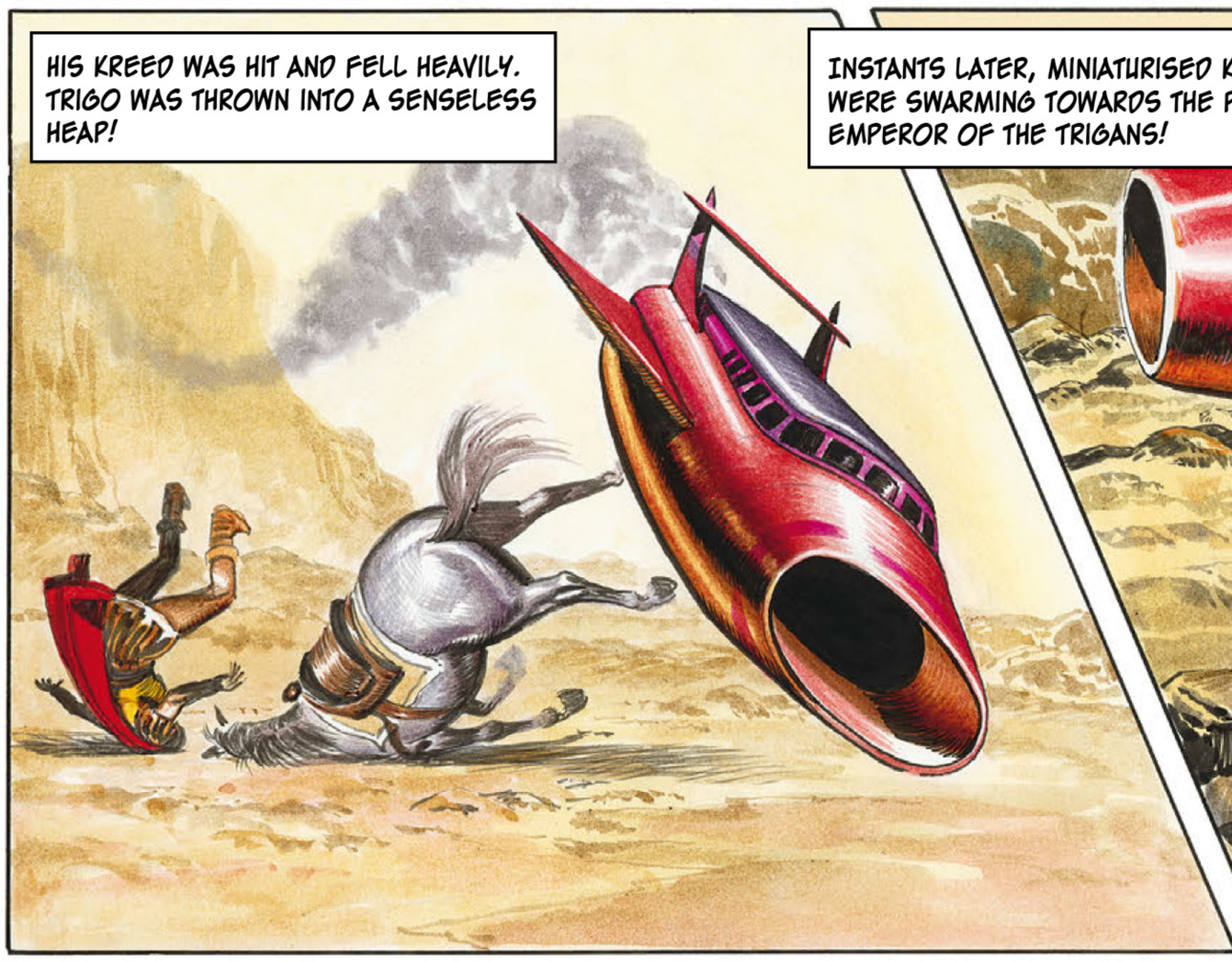

JANNO'S A GOOD LAD BUT HE NEEDS THE ASSISTANCE OF AN OLDER AND WISER HEAD. GO TO ZELPH, PERIC, AND GIVE HIM ALL THE HELP YOU CAN.
AT ONCE, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.


IT WAS AT DAWN THE FOLLOWING DAY THAT THE BIRDS WHO ROOSTED ON THE TOP OF THE GREAT TRIUMPHAL ARCH IN TRIGAN CITY WERE DISTURBED BY A NEW ARRIVAL.

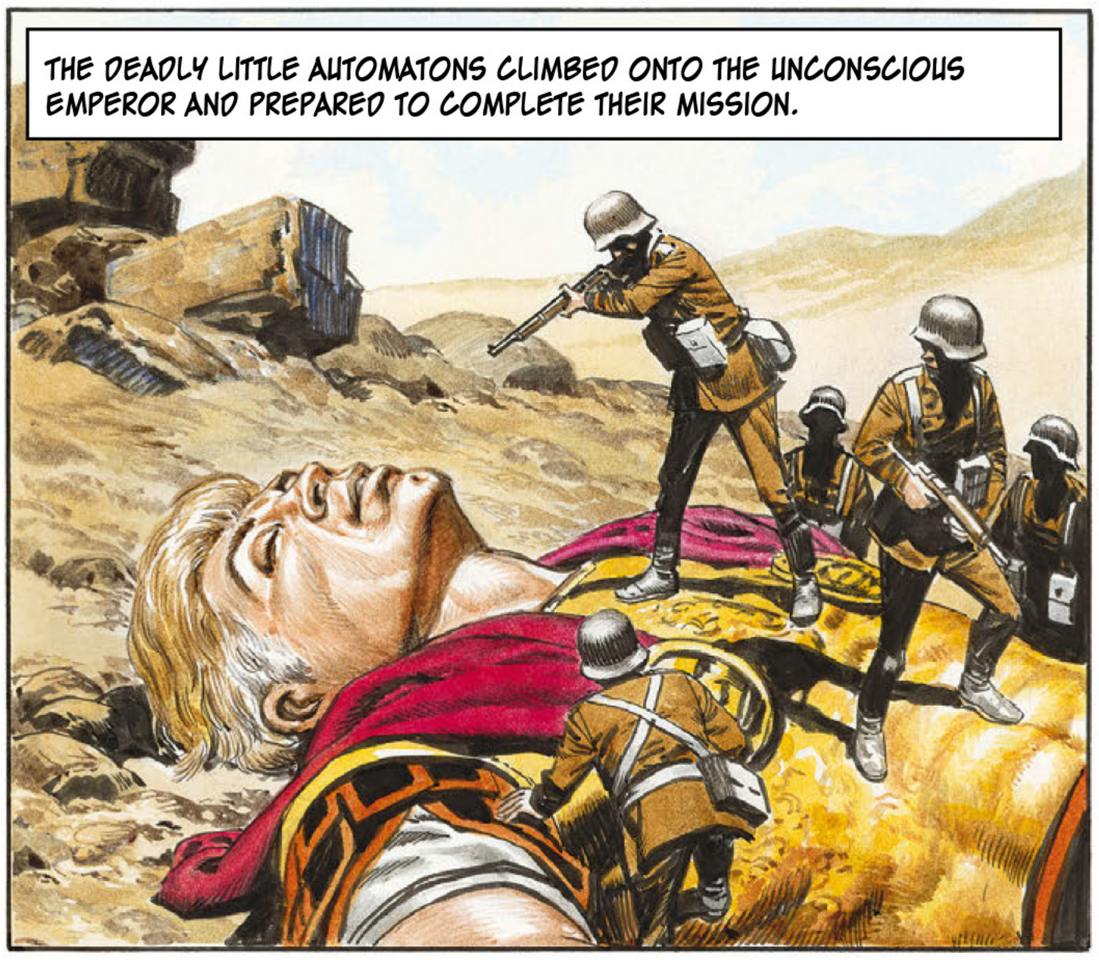
HIDDEN FROM THE SPRAWLING CITY BELOW, TINY FIGURES EMERGED FROM THE MINIATURE AIRCRAFT. A MESSAGE WAS SENT OUT.
CALLING HEADQUARTERS. WE HAVE ARRIVED IN POSITION FOR OFFENSIVE ACTION AND AWAIT FURTHER ORDERS.


THE MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED IN BLACK ZAPPO'S GLOOMY CASTLE IN FAR-OFF ZELPH.
YOUR ORDERS, MASTER?
TELL THE FIENDS TO SEEK OUT AND ATTACK AND DESTROY THE EMPEROR IMMEDIATELY!

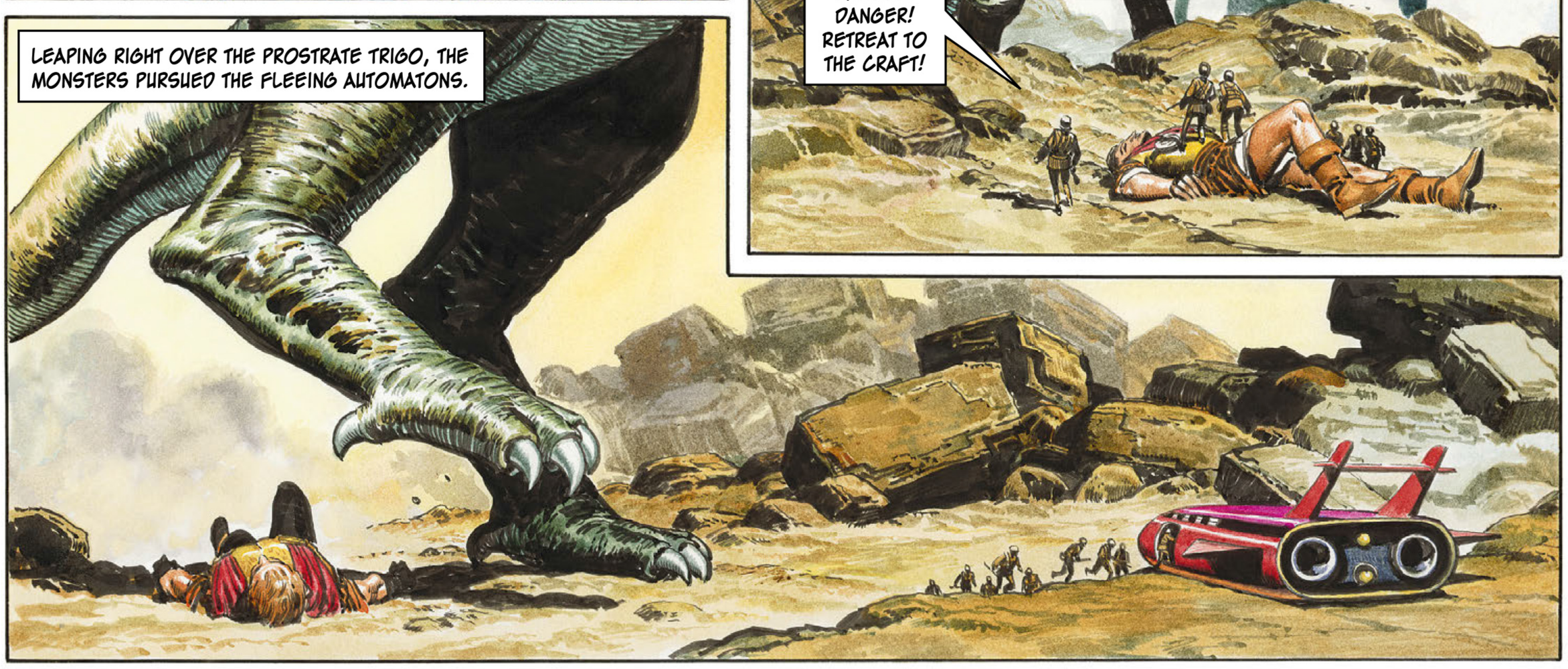

THAT MORNING, AS WAS HIS FREQUENT CUSTOM, TRIGO RODE OUT ON TO THE PLAINS IN SEARCH OF ZARGOTS. HE SAW THE SMALL SHAPE WINGING TOWARDS HIM, HEARD THE RATTLE OF GUNFIRE...
BY ALL THE STARS!

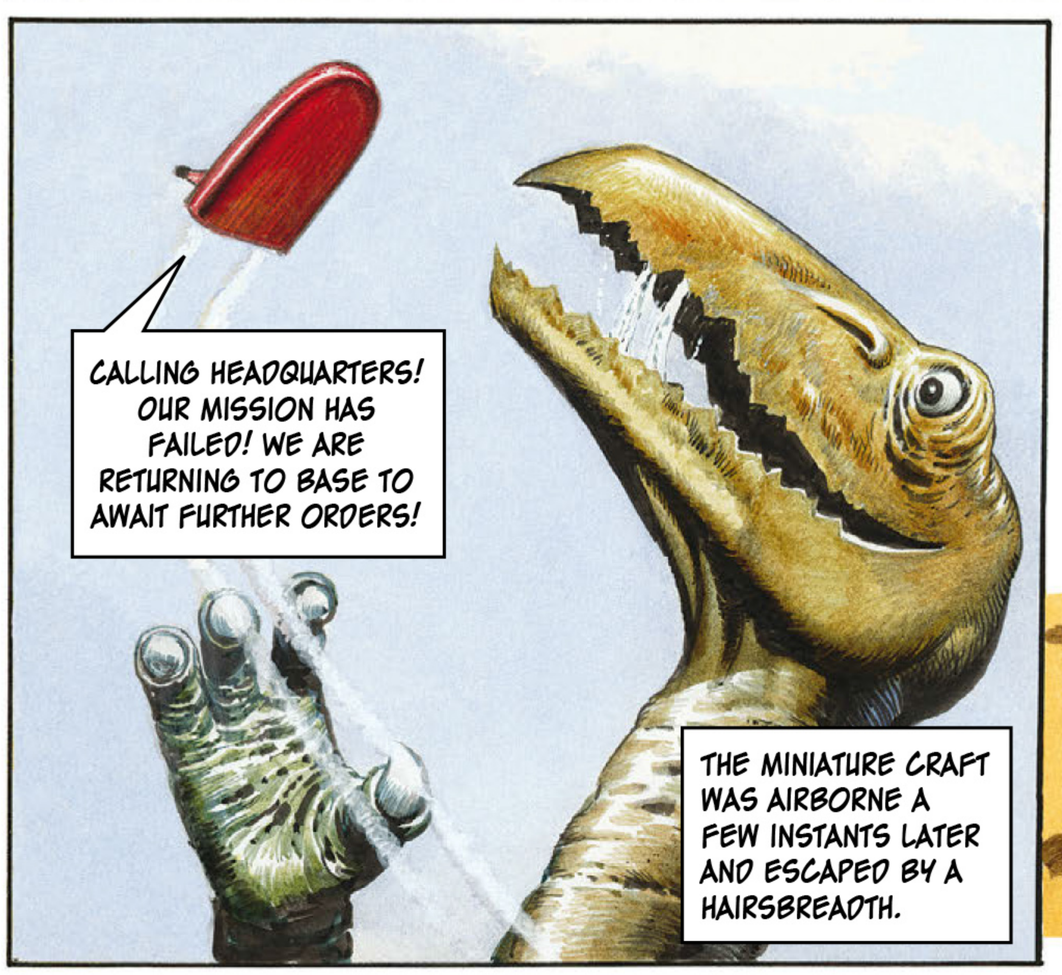

HIS KREED WAS HIT AND FELL HEAVILY. TRIGO WAS THROWN INTO A SENSELESS HEAP!

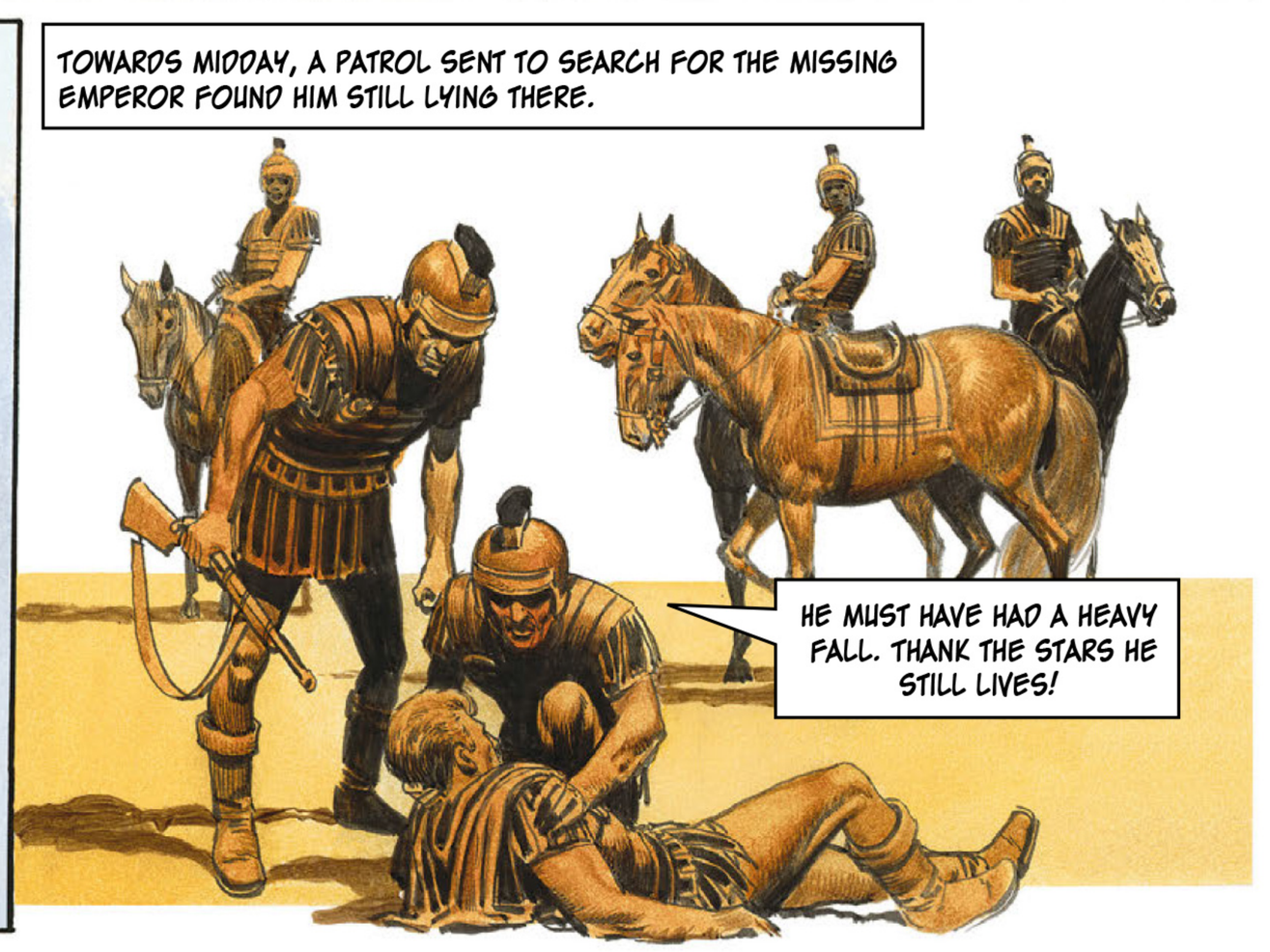
INSTANTS LATER, MINIATURISED KILLERS WERE SWARMING TOWARDS THE PROSTRATE EMPEROR OF THE TRIGANS!
DISPATCH HIM! FINISH HIM OFF!

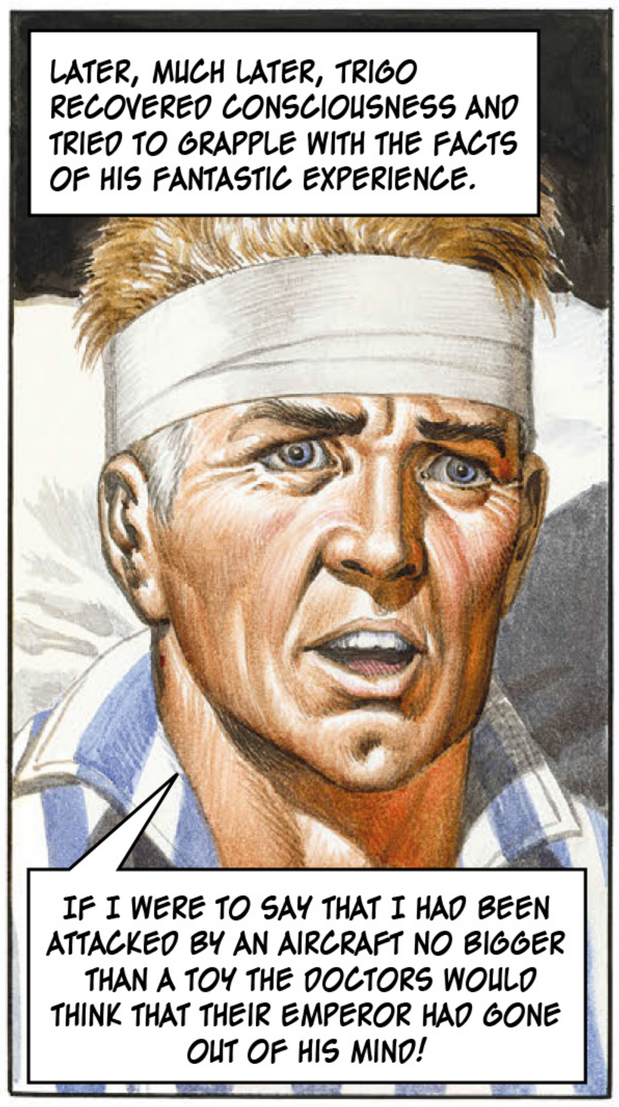

THE DEADLY LITTLE AUTOMATONS CLIMBED ONTO THE UNCONSCIOUS EMPEROR AND PREPARED TO COMPLETE THEIR MISSION.

SUDDENLY – ZARGOTS!
DANGER! DANGER! RETREAT TO THE CRAFT!


LEAPING RIGHT OVER THE PROSTRATE TRIGO, THE MONSTERS PURSUED THE FLEEING AUTOMATONS.

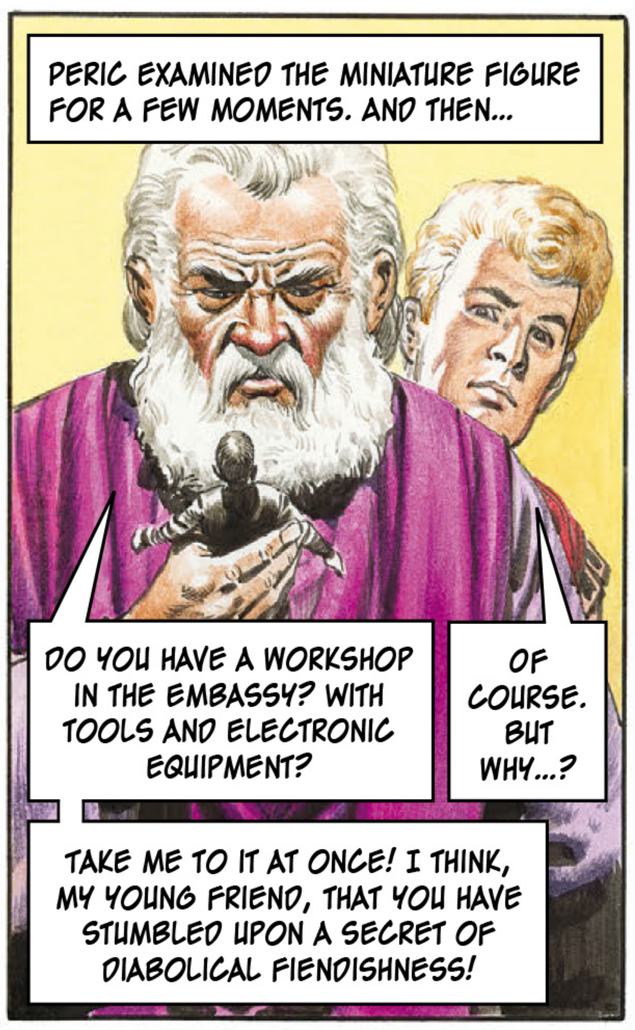

CALLING HEADQUARTERS! OUR MISSION HAS FAILED! WE ARE RETURNING TO BASE TO AWAIT FURTHER ORDERS!
THE MINIATURE CRAFT WAS AIRBORNE A FEW INSTANTS LATER AND ESCAPED BY A HAIRSBREADTH.


TOWARDS MIDDAY, A PATROL SENT TO SEARCH FOR THE MISSING EMPEROR FOUND HIM STILL LYING THERE.
HE MUST HAVE HAD A HEAVY FALL. THANK THE STARS HE STILL LIVES!


LATER, MUCH LATER, TRIGO RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRIED TO GRAPPLE WITH THE FACTS OF HIS FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE.
IF I WERE TO SAY THAT I HAD BEEN ATTACKED BY AN AIRCRAFT NO BIGGER THAN A TOY THE DOCTORS WOULD THINK THAT THEIR EMPEROR HAD GONE OUT OF HIS MIND!

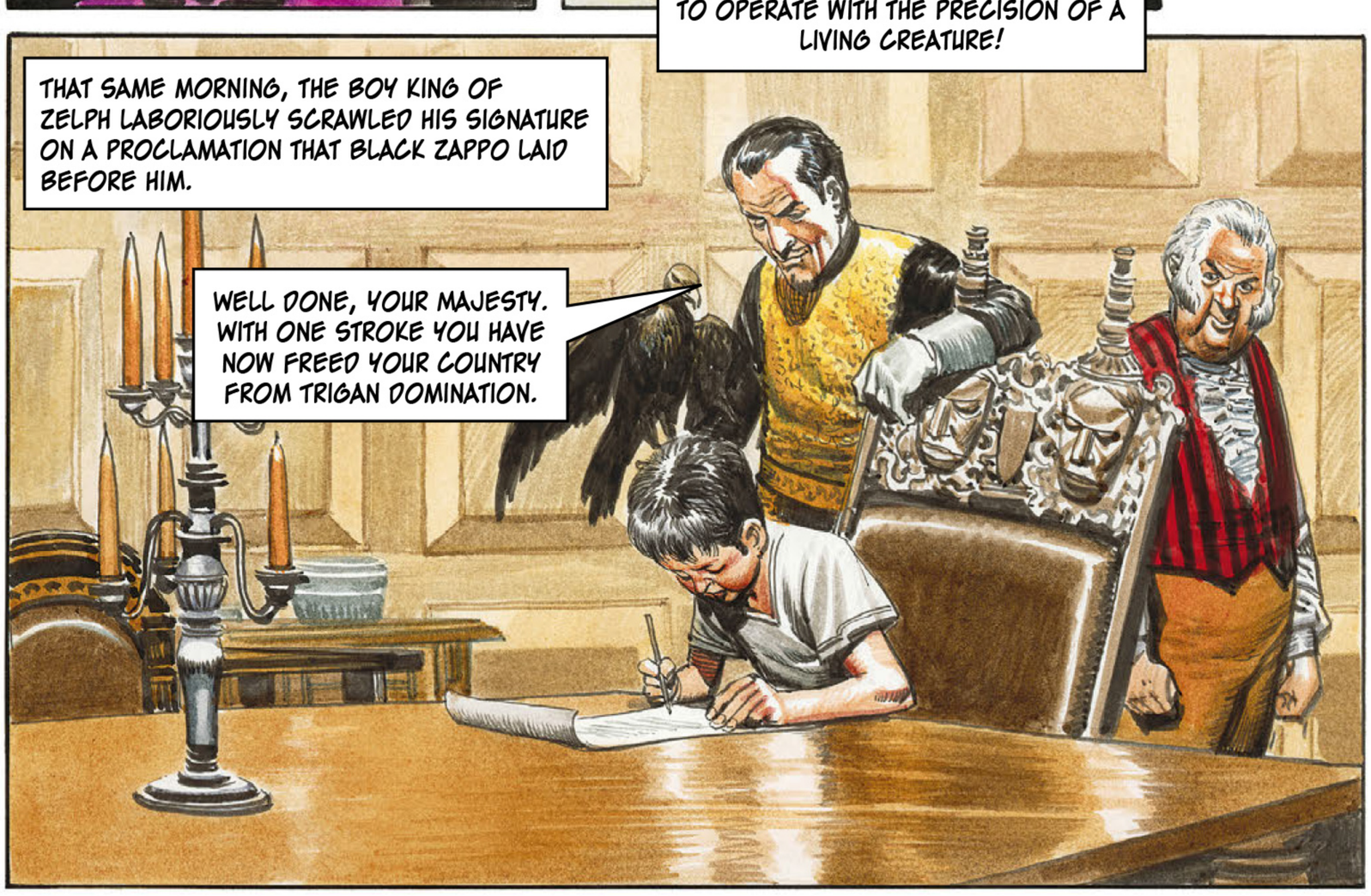
PERIC, MEANWHILE, HAD ARRIVED IN THE ZELPH CAPITAL WHERE HE WAS BRIEFED BY JANNO.
YOU THINK THIS BLACK ZAPPO IS A DANGER?
I'M CONVINCED HE'LL SNATCH THE THRONE FOR HIMSELF AT ANY TIME. WHEN THAT HAPPENS, WE CAN EXPECT TO BE ARRESTED – OR ASSASSINATED!

JANNO THEN SPOKE OF HIS NARROW ESCAPE IN THE AIR RACE.
YOU THINK YOUR RACER WAS SABOTAGED... BUT HOW?
I DON'T KNOW. ALL I KNOW IS THAT THIS WAS FOUND AMONG THE WRECKAGE.


PERIC EXAMINED THE MINIATURE FIGURE FOR A FEW MOMENTS. AND THEN...
DO YOU HAVE A WORKSHOP IN THE EMBASSY? WITH TOOLS AND ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT?
OF COURSE. BUT WHY...?
TAKE ME TO IT AT ONCE! I THINK, MY YOUNG FRIEND, THAT YOU HAVE STUMBLED UPON A SECRET OF DIABOLICAL FIENDISHNESS!

ALL THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT, PERIC WORKED UPON THE FIGURE.
IT IS AN ELECTRONIC AUTOMATON!
PRECISELY! AND OF SUCH FANTASTIC SOPHISTICATION THAT IT CAN BE MADE TO OPERATE WITH THE PRECISION OF A LIVING CREATURE!

AT DAWN, THE GREAT SCIENTIST GAVE AN ORDER...
STAND UP! RAISE YOUR RIGHT ARM!
BY ALL THE DEMONS OF DAVELI! IT OBEYS YOU!


THAT SAME MORNING, THE BOY KING OF ZELPH LABORIOUSLY SCRAWLED HIS SIGNATURE ON A PROCLAMATION THAT BLACK ZAPPO LAID BEFORE HIM.
WELL DONE, YOUR MAJESTY. WITH ONE STROKE YOU HAVE NOW FREED YOUR COUNTRY FROM TRIGAN DOMINATION.

TO SILENCE ALL POSSIBLE ARGUMENT, JANNO AND TRIGO MUST BE ELIMINATED IMMEDIATELY. GIVE THE ORDERS TO OUR FIENDISH LITTLE FRIENDS. AND THIS TIME THERE MUST BE NO BLUNDERING!

AS NIGHT FELL OVER TRIGAN CITY, THE MINIATURE AIRCRAFT DESCENDED TOWARDS THE RAMPARTS OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE.

CALLING HEADQUARTERS. WE ARE JUST ABOUT TO LAND ON THE PALACE ROOF TO CARRY OUT THE ELIMINATION OF THE EMPEROR!

TRIGO WAS HOSTING A FEAST FOR THE ENVOYS FROM ALL PARTS OF HIS FAR-FLUNG EMPIRE. SUDDENLY THE CONVERSATION CEASED...

BY ALL THE STARS!

THE MINIATURE KILLERS HAD ARRIVED!

NO ONE MOVE – OR ALL WILL DIE!

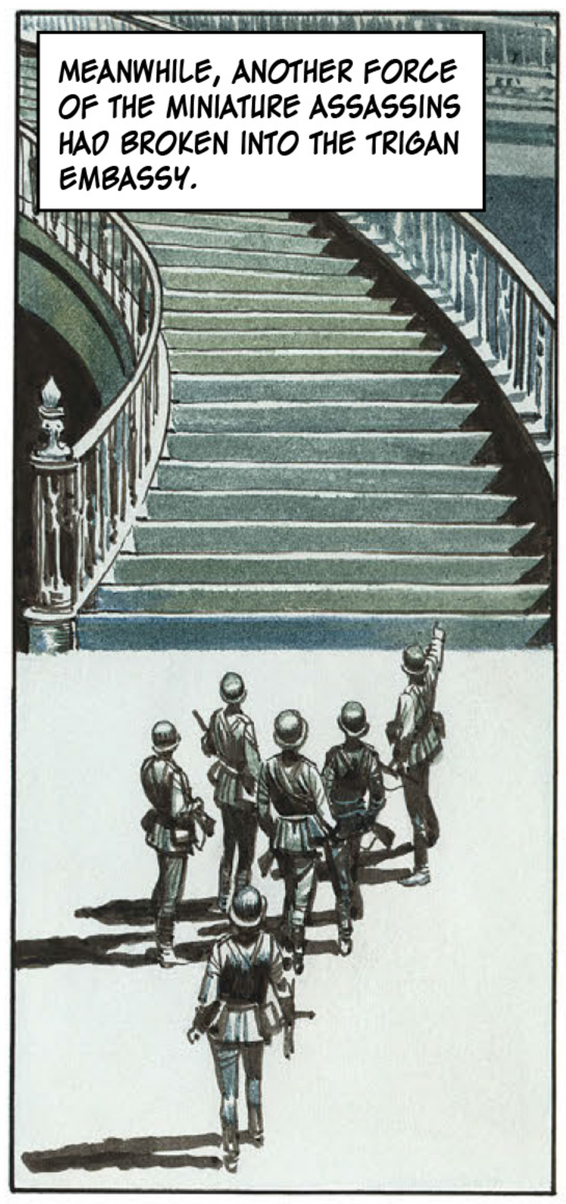
THERE IS THE EMPEROR! SHOOT HIM DOWN!

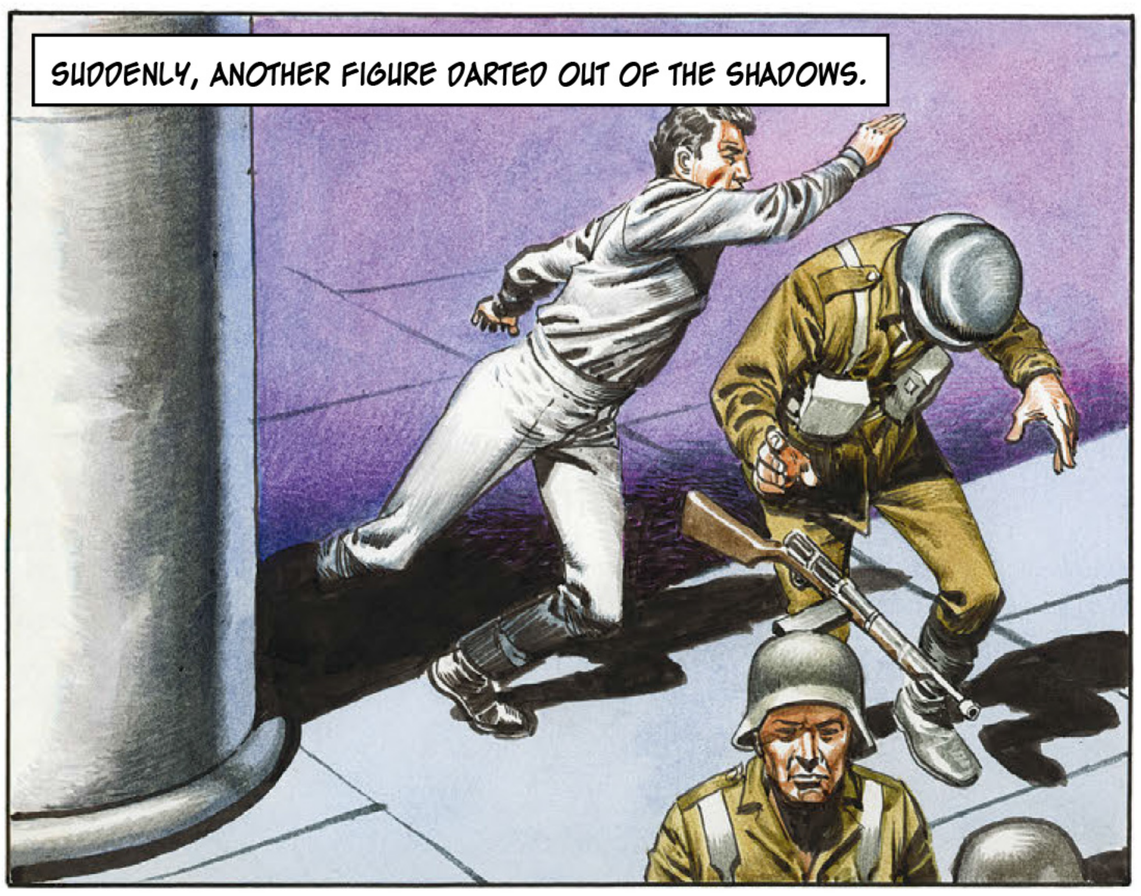
A GALLANT PALACE GUARD SWIPED WITH HIS SWORD AT THE SMALL FIGURES – AND PAID THE PRICE!

THE GUARD'S BRAVE ACTION UNDOUBTEDLY SAVED THE EMPEROR'S LIFE. TRIGO SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY – AND LEAPT!

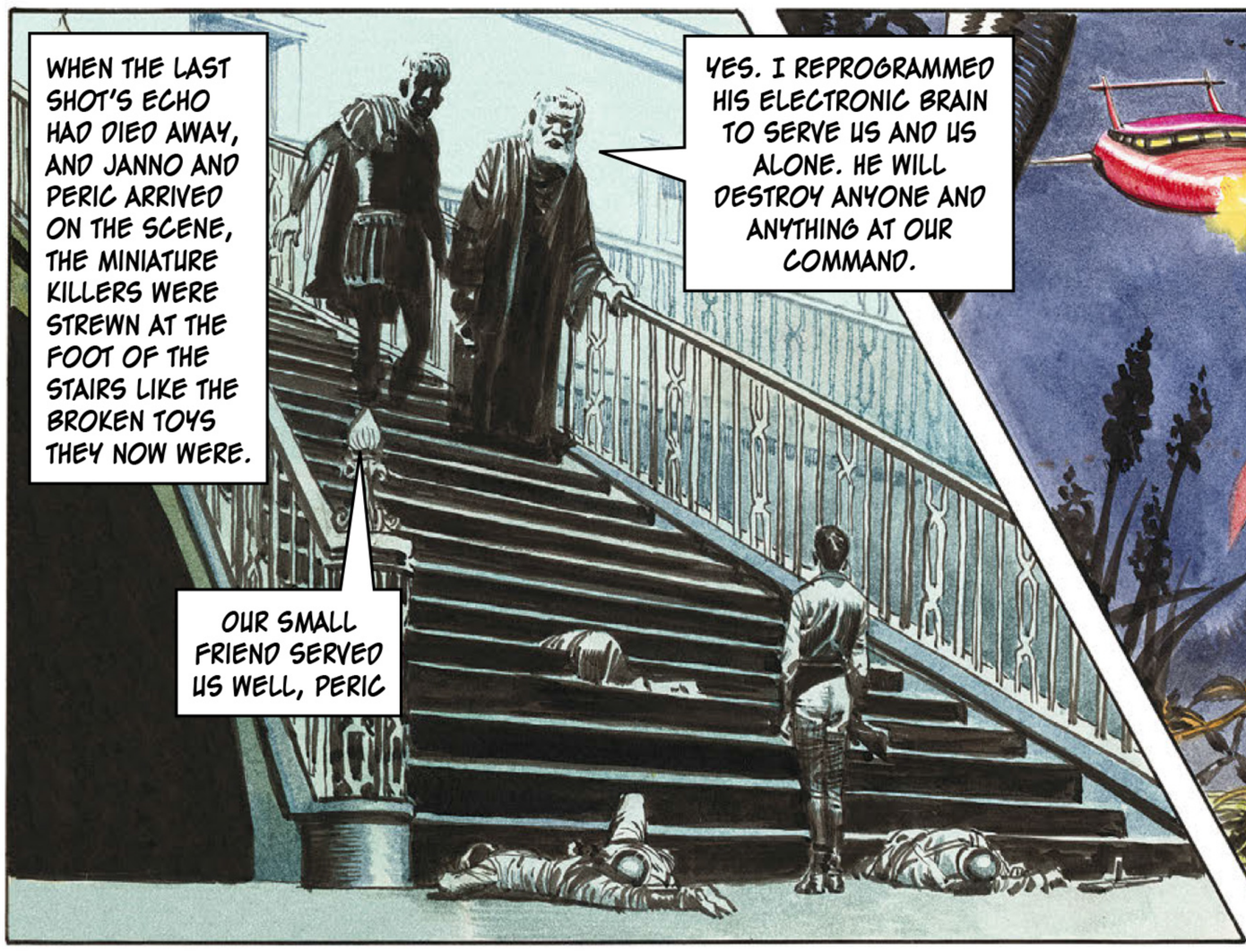
HE SAILED ACROSS THE CHAMBER AND OUT INTO THE NIGHT WITH PROJECTILES BURNING THE AIR ALL ROUND HIM!

NEWS OF THE EMPEROR'S ESCAPE WAS TRANSMITTED BACK TO THE ZELPH CAPITAL WHERE BLACK ZAPPO AND HIS SINISTER HENCHMAN WERE CONTROLLING THE NIGHT'S OPERATIONS.
CALLING HEADQUARTERS! TRIGO HAS LEAPT OUT OF A WINDOW. WE AWAIT FURTHER ORDERS!
GET AFTER HIM, YOU BUNGLERS! HE MUST BE ELIMINATED AT ALL COSTS.


MEANWHILE, ANOTHER FORCE OF THE MINIATURE ASSASSINS HAD BROKEN INTO THE TRIGAN EMBASSY.

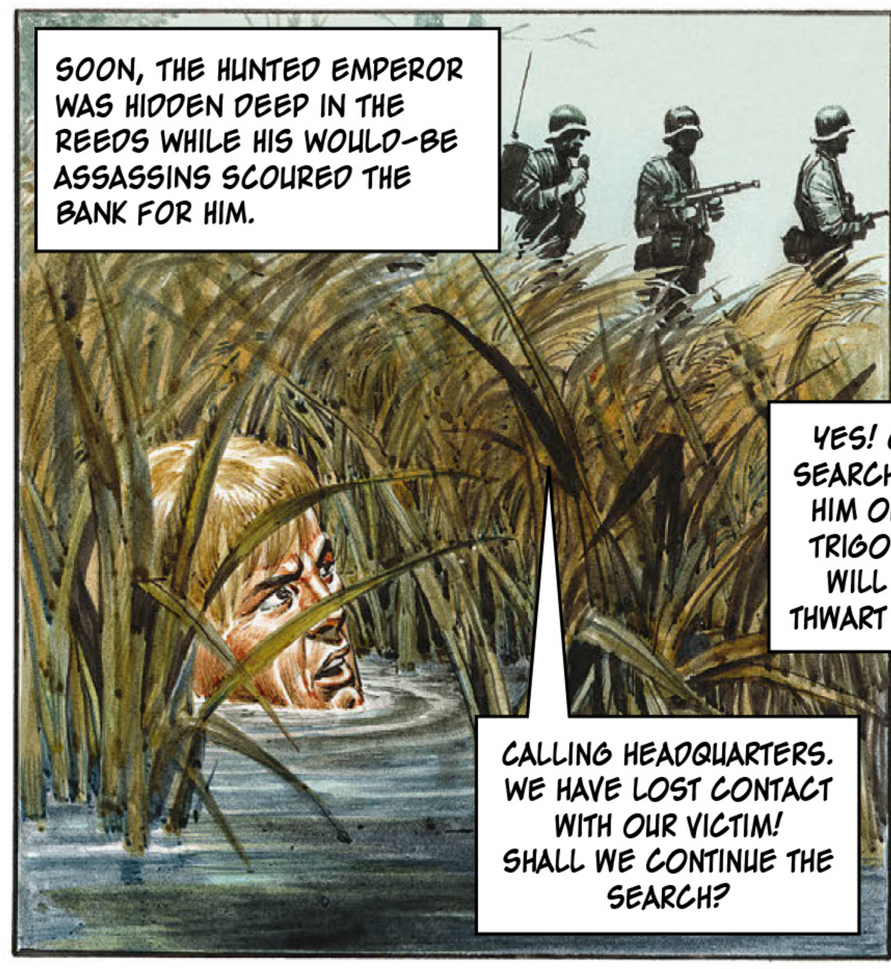

SUDDENLY, ANOTHER FIGURE DARTED OUT OF THE SHADOWS.

THE FALLEN WEAPON WAS SNATCHED UP, AIMED AND FIRED!


WHEN THE LAST SHOT'S ECHO HAD DIED AWAY, AND JANNO AND PERIC ARRIVED ON THE SCENE, THE MINIATURE KILLERS WERE STREWN AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS LIKE THE BROKEN TOYS THEY NOW WERE.
YES. I REPROGRAMMED HIS ELECTRONIC BRAIN TO SERVE US AND US ALONE. HE WILL DESTROY ANYONE AND ANYTHING AT OUR COMMAND.
OUR SMALL FRIEND SERVED US WELL, PERIC

AT THAT SAME INSTANT, TRIGO WAS BEING PURSUED THROUGH HIS OWN PALACE GROUNDS BY HIS RELENTLESS HUNTERS.
AAGH! I'M DONE FOR!

THE MINIATURE AIRCRAFT WAS STILL DISCHARGING ITS DEADLY PROJECTILES AS TRIGO LEAPT FROM A HIGH BRIDGE.

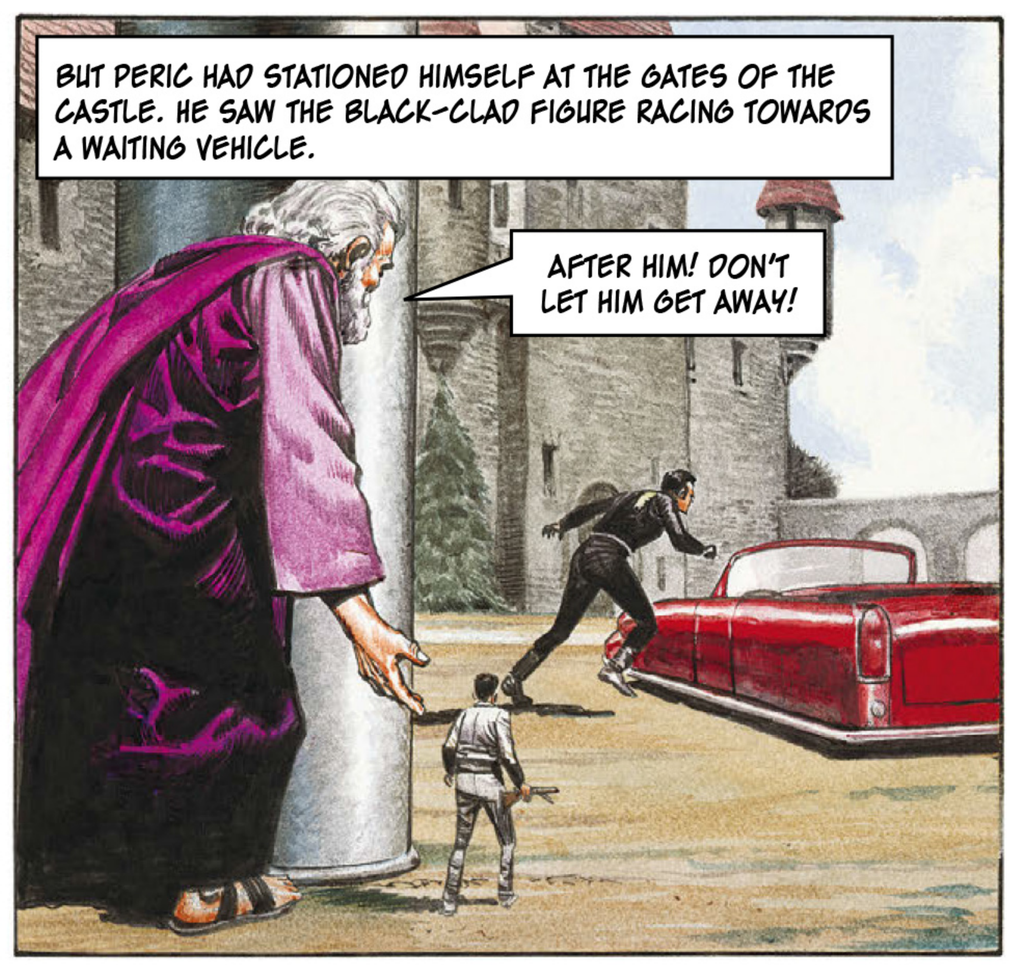

SOON, THE HUNTED EMPEROR WAS HIDDEN DEEP IN THE REEDS WHILE HIS WOULD-BE ASSASSINS SCOURED THE BANK FOR HIM.
CALLING HEADQUARTERS. WE HAVE LOST CONTACT WITH OUR VICTIM! SHALL WE CONTINUE THE SEARCH?

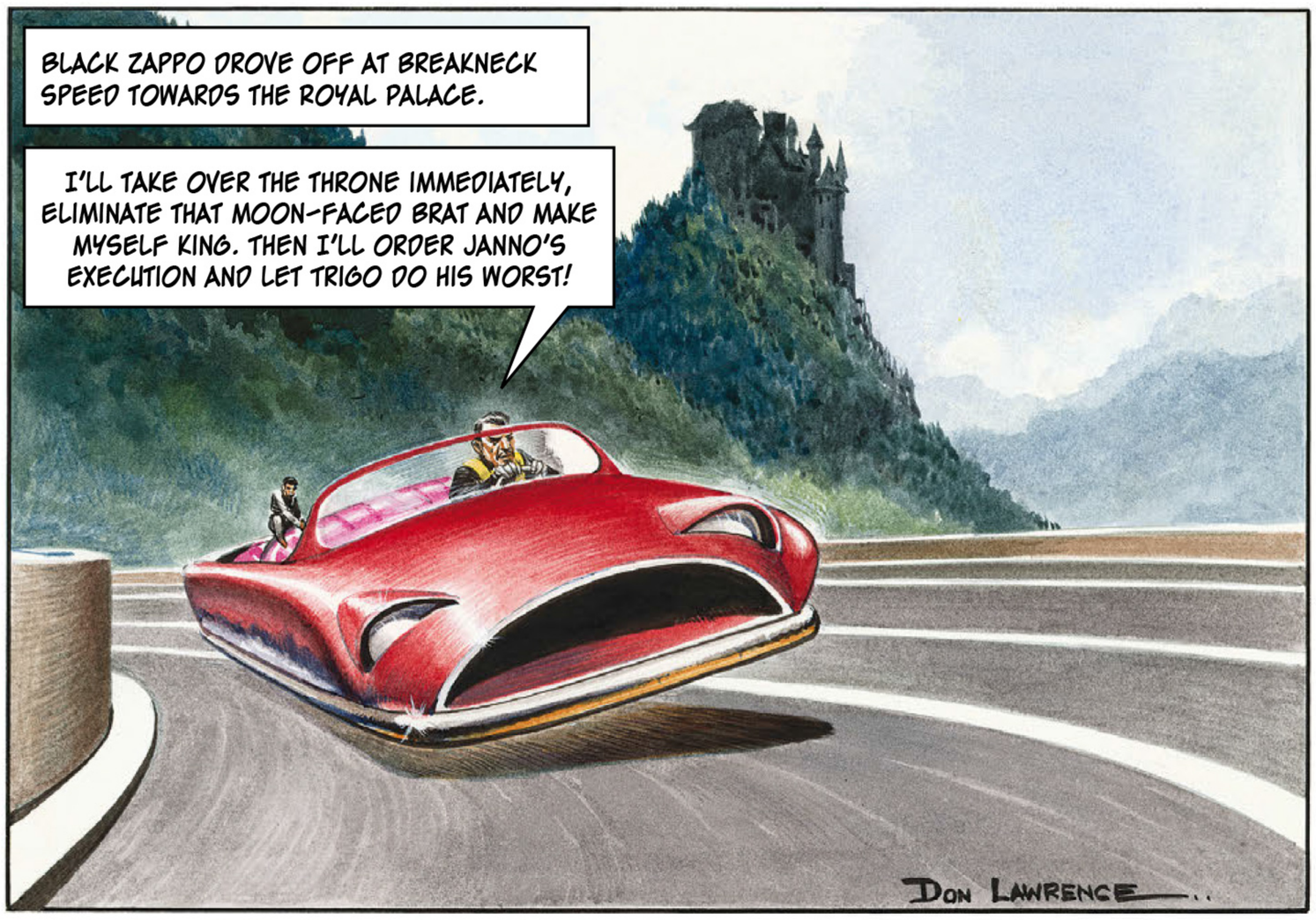
BACK IN HIS GRIM CASTLE ABOVE ZELPH CITY, BLACK ZAPPO AND HIS HENCHMAN WERE DIRECTING THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT.
YES! CONTINUE SEARCHING! SEEK HIM OUT! WHILE TRIGO LIVES HE WILL ALWAYS THWART MY PLANS!

SUDDENLY – AN INTERRUPTION!
AAAAH! IT'S LORD JANNO!
TEN THOUSAND FURIES! HE WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED!
GIVE THE ORDER TO THOSE FIENDS IN TRIGAN CITY! TELL THEM TO SURRENDER!

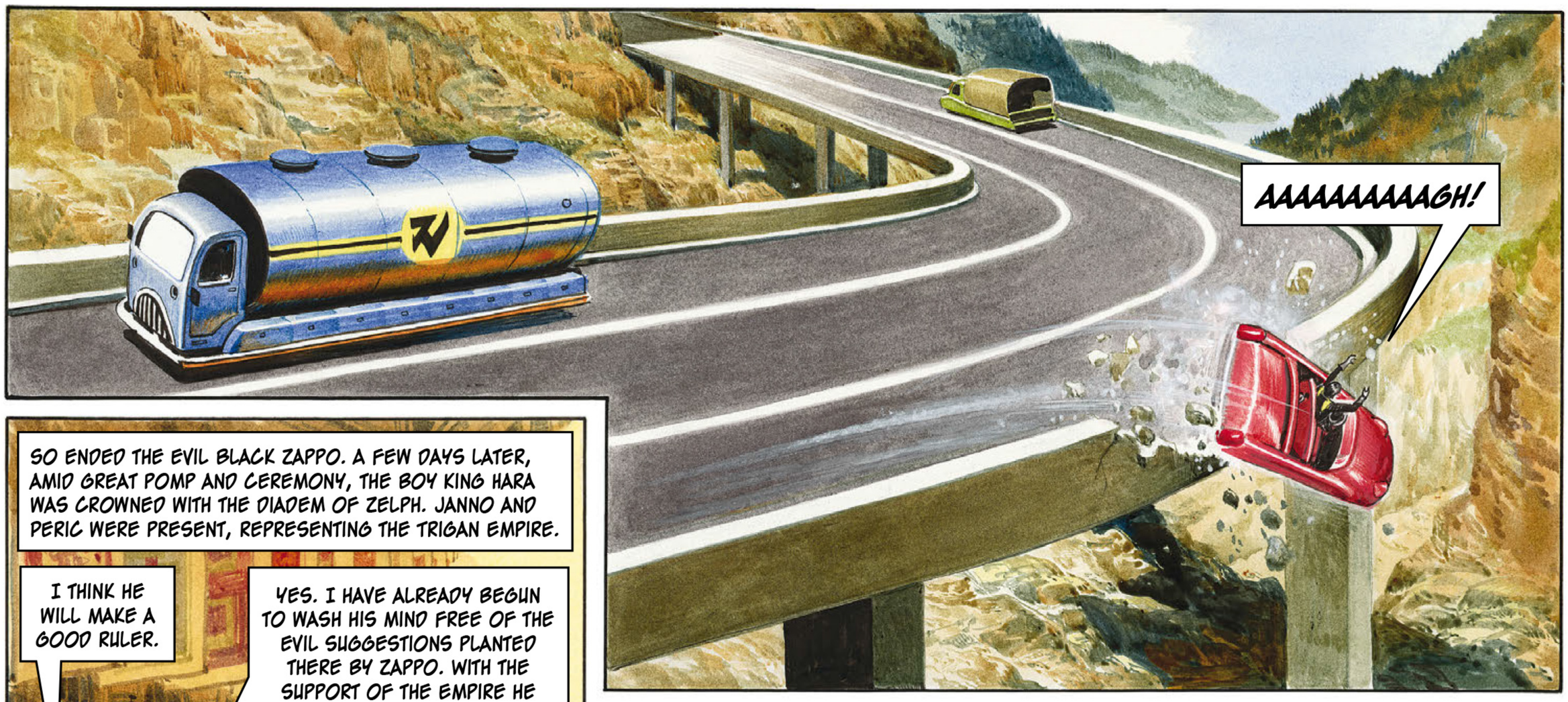
THE HENCHMAN'S NERVE CRACKED – BUT BLACK ZAPPO WAS MADE OF STERNER STUFF!
TRIGAN! TAKE THAT!
ABANDON THE OPERATION! SURRENDER TO THE TRIGANS, DO YOU HEAR?
A-A-AWWWK!

JANNO DROPPED HIS WEAPON AND RAISED HIS HANDS TO PROTECT HIS FACE FROM THE YOTH'S SLASHING TALONS. HE DID NOT SEE BLACK ZAPPO MAKE HIS ESCAPE.
AAAAAGH!


BUT PERIC HAD STATIONED HIMSELF AT THE GATES OF THE CASTLE. HE SAW THE BLACK-CLAD FIGURE RACING TOWARDS A WAITING VEHICLE.
AFTER HIM! DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY!


BLACK ZAPPO DROVE OFF AT BREAKNECK SPEED TOWARDS THE ROYAL PALACE.
I'LL TAKE OVER THE THRONE IMMEDIATELY, ELIMINATE THAT MOON-FACED BRAT AND MAKE MYSELF KING. THEN I'LL ORDER JANNO'S EXECUTION AND LET TRIGO DO HIS WORST!
DON LAWRENCE

AND THEN...
RAISE YOUR HANDS ABOVE YOUR HEAD OR I FIRE!
EEEEEEEEEH!


AAAAAAAAAAGH!

SO ENDED THE EVIL BLACK ZAPPO. A FEW DAYS LATER, AMID GREAT POMP AND CEREMONY, THE BOY KING HARA WAS CROWNED WITH THE DIADEM OF ZELPH. JANNO AND PERIC WERE PRESENT, REPRESENTING THE TRIGAN EMPIRE.
I THINK HE WILL MAKE A GOOD RULER.
YES. I HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO WASH HIS MIND FREE OF THE EVIL SUGGESTIONS PLANTED THERE BY ZAPPO. WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE EMPIRE HE WILL GROW TO LEAD HIS PEOPLE TO PEACE AND HAPPINESS.

HIS MISSION COMPLETED, JANNO WAS ABLE TO RETURN TO TRIGAN CITY.
YOU HAVE DONE WELL AT YOUR AMBASSADORIAL DUTIES, LAD. BUT I THINK YOU WILL BE GLAD TO GO BACK TO THE AIR FLEET!
I CERTAINLY WILL, UNCLE!

IN A GRIMY BACK STREET IN THE ZELPH CAPITAL, PEOPLE STILL POINT OUT THE DILAPIDATED TOYSHOP-LONG EMPTY- WHERE THE FIENDISH MINIATURE KILLERS WERE MADE.

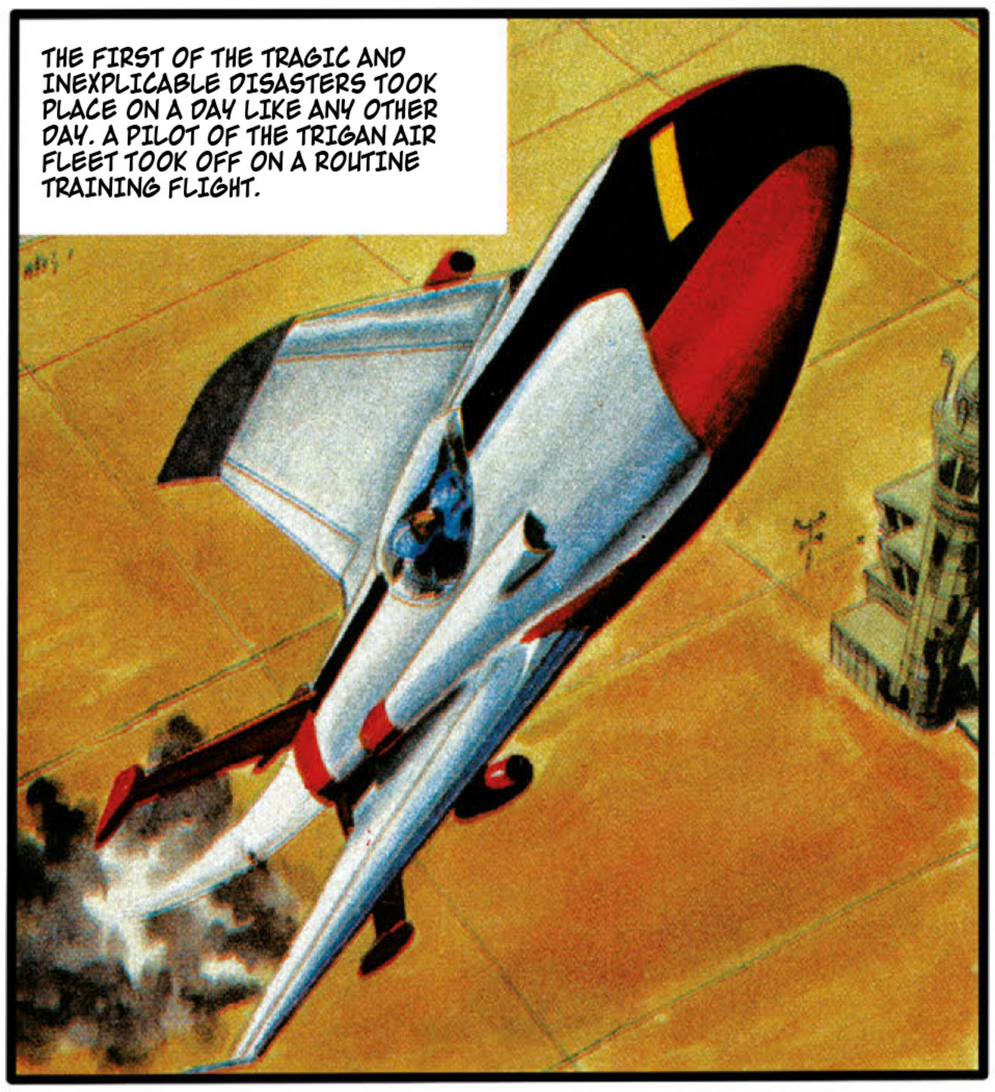
XXXIII

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

DORAN THE HYPNOTIST

Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 535-540

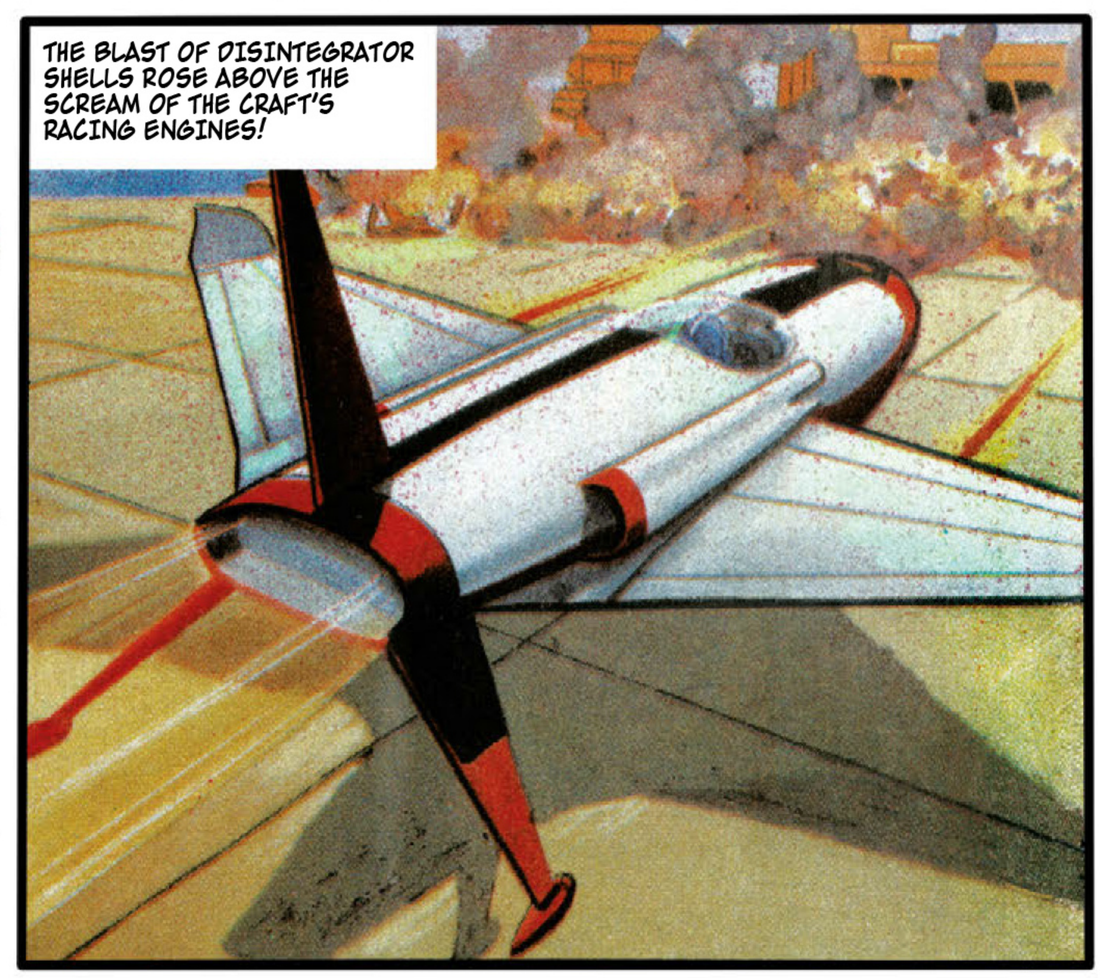
17th April 1972 – 20th May 1972

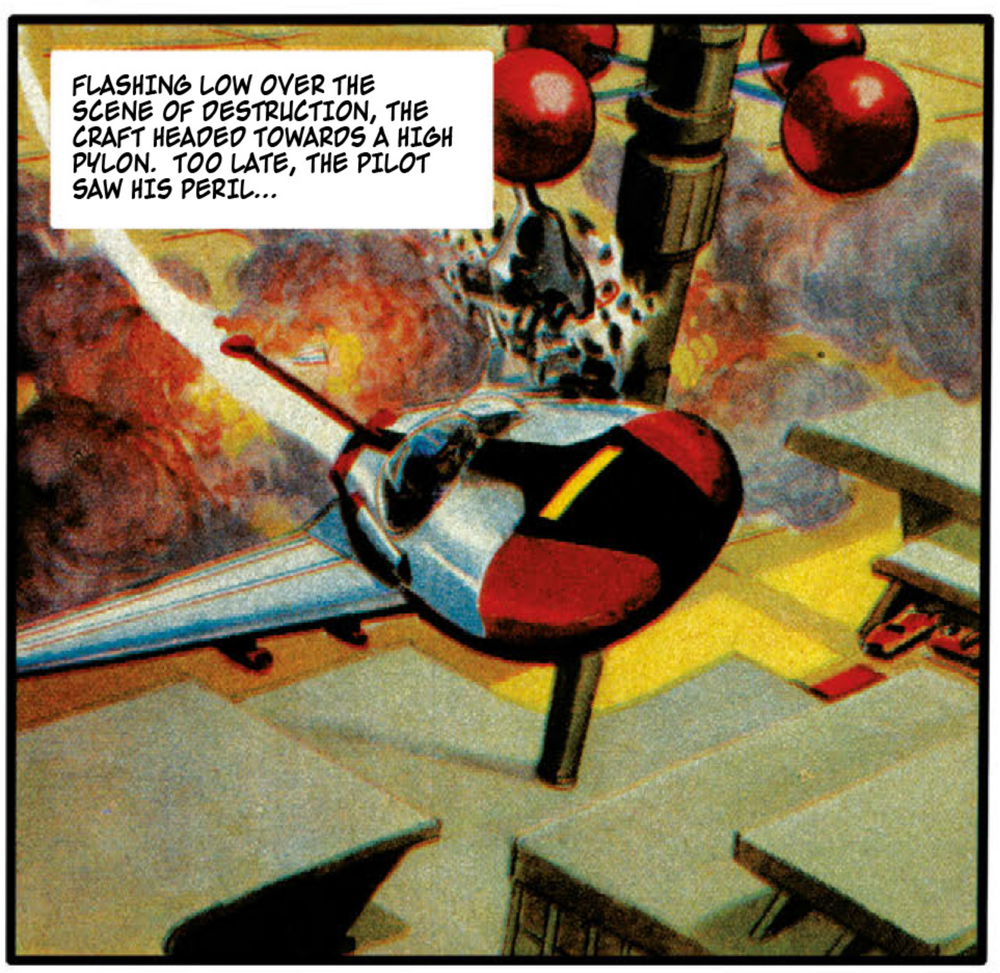

THE FIRST OF THE TRAGIC AND INEXPLICABLE DISASTERS TOOK PLACE ON A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER DAY. A PILOT OF THE TRIGAN AIR FLEET TOOK OFF ON A ROUTINE TRAINING FLIGHT.

HIS INSTRUCTOR AND FLIGHT COMMANDER WATCHED HIM GO.
GARRAN IS A PROMISING YOUNG FIGHTER PILOT.
YES, AND CAREFUL, TOO. NOT LIKE SOME OF THE YOUNG HOT-HEADS WE'VE BEEN GETTING RECENTLY.

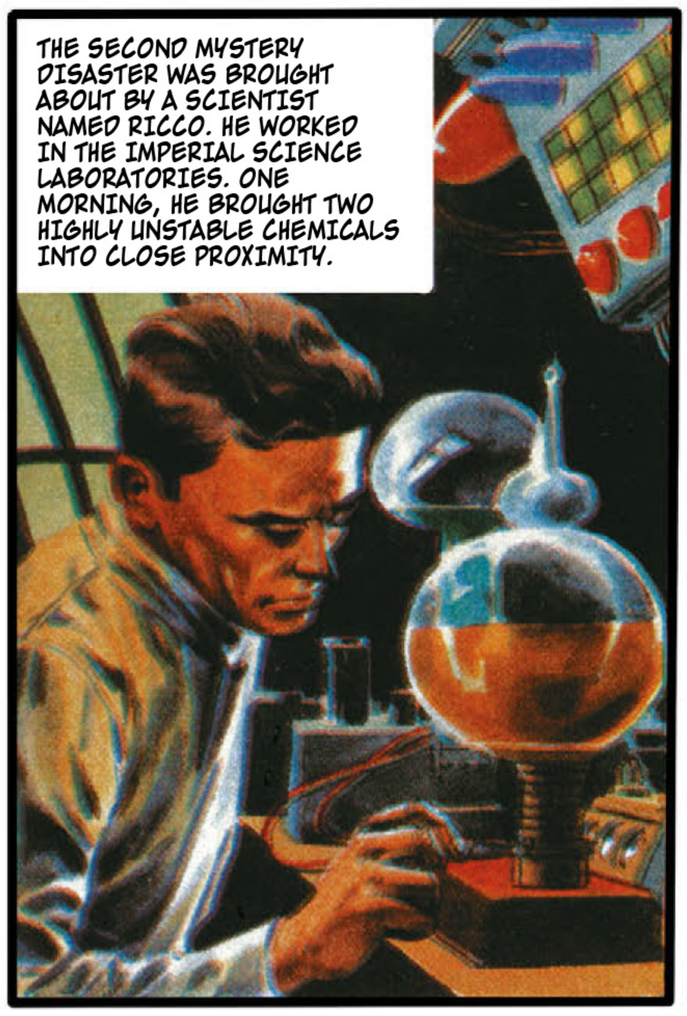
SUDDENLY, THE CRAFT FLIPPED OVER – AND STREAKED BACK TOWARDS THE AIR BASE AT ZERO HEIGHT.

LOOK OUT!
WHAT DOES HE THINK – ?


THE BLAST OF DISINTEGRATOR SHELLS ROSE ABOVE THE SCREAM OF THE CRAFT'S RACING ENGINES!

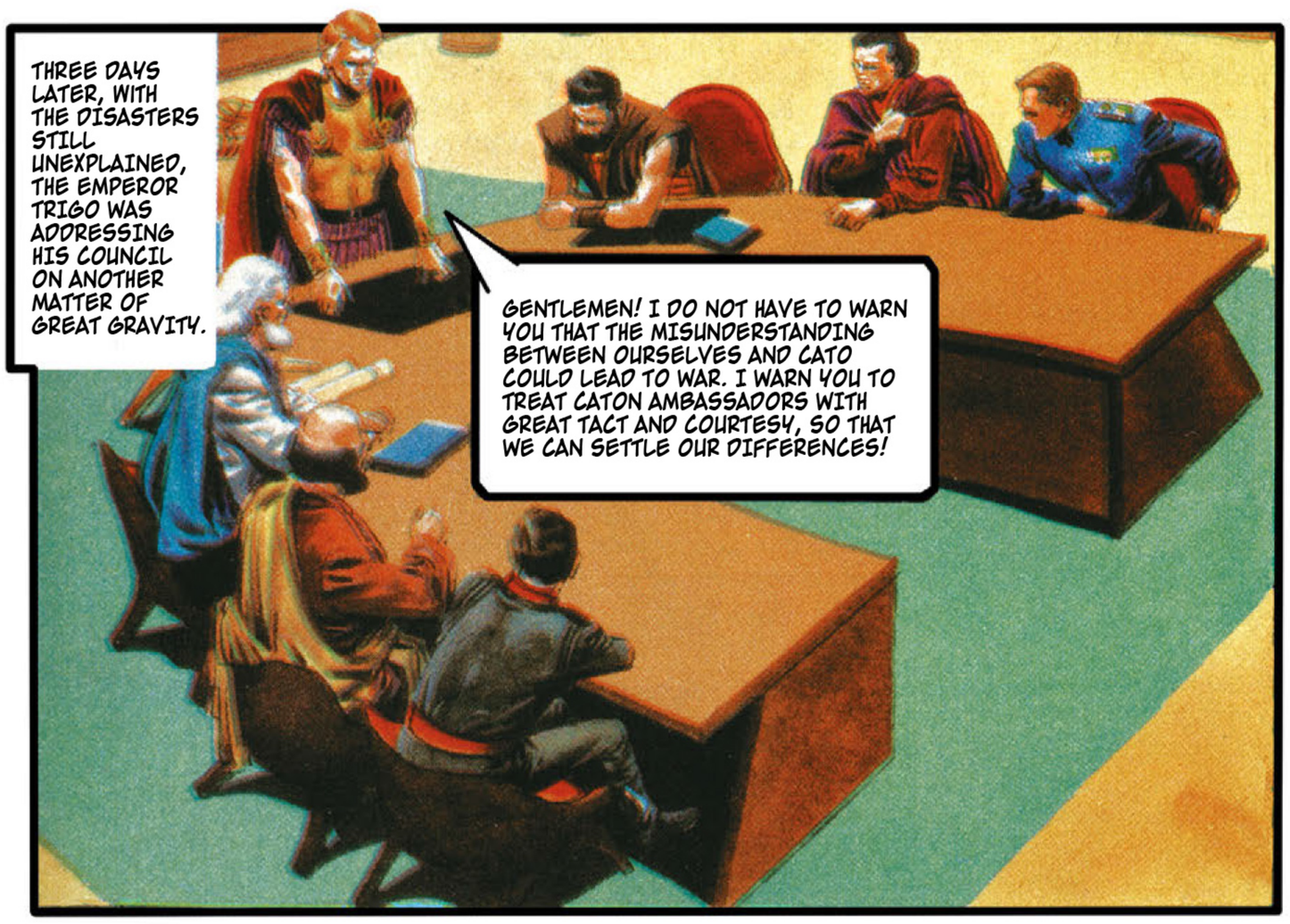

FLASHING LOW OVER THE SCENE OF DESTRUCTION, THE CRAFT HEADED TOWARDS A HIGH PYLON. TOO LATE, THE PILOT SAW HIS PERIL...

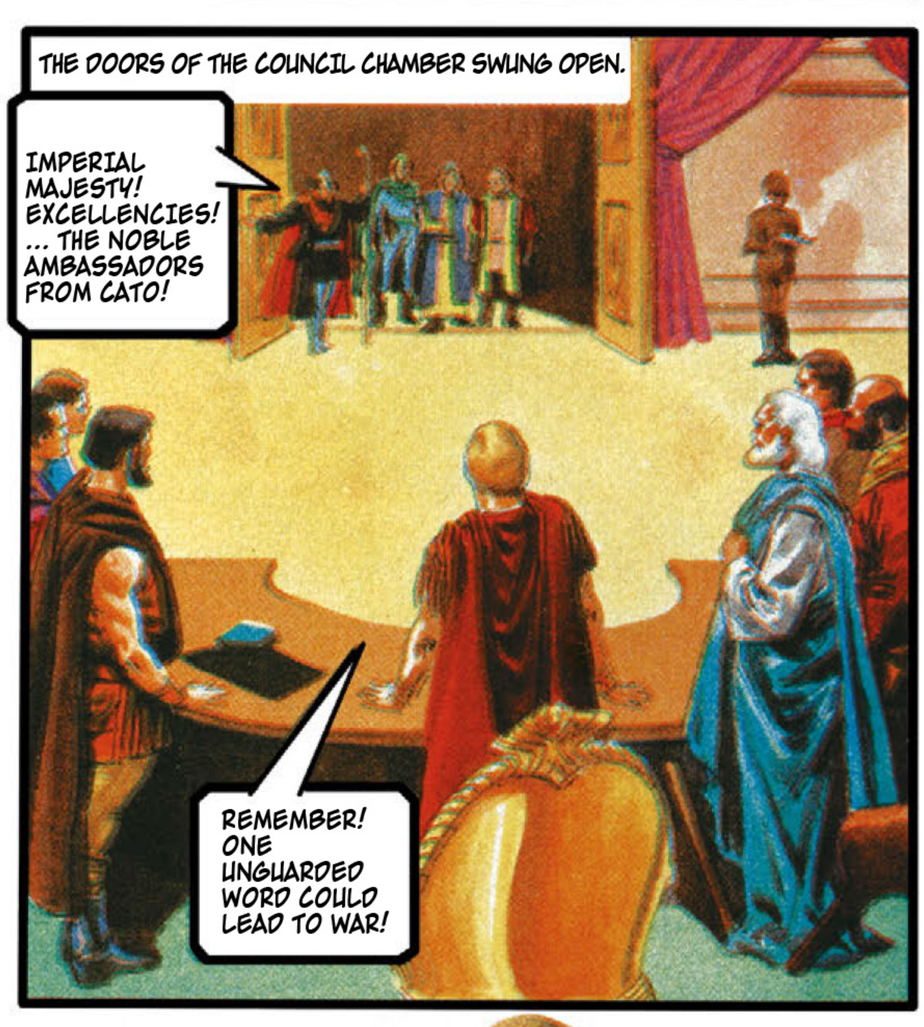
BY THE TIME THEY REACHED THE SCENE OF THE CRASH, IT WAS TOO LATE TO DO ANYTHING.
WHY DID HE DO IT – WHY?
WE'LL NEVER KNOW – NOW!

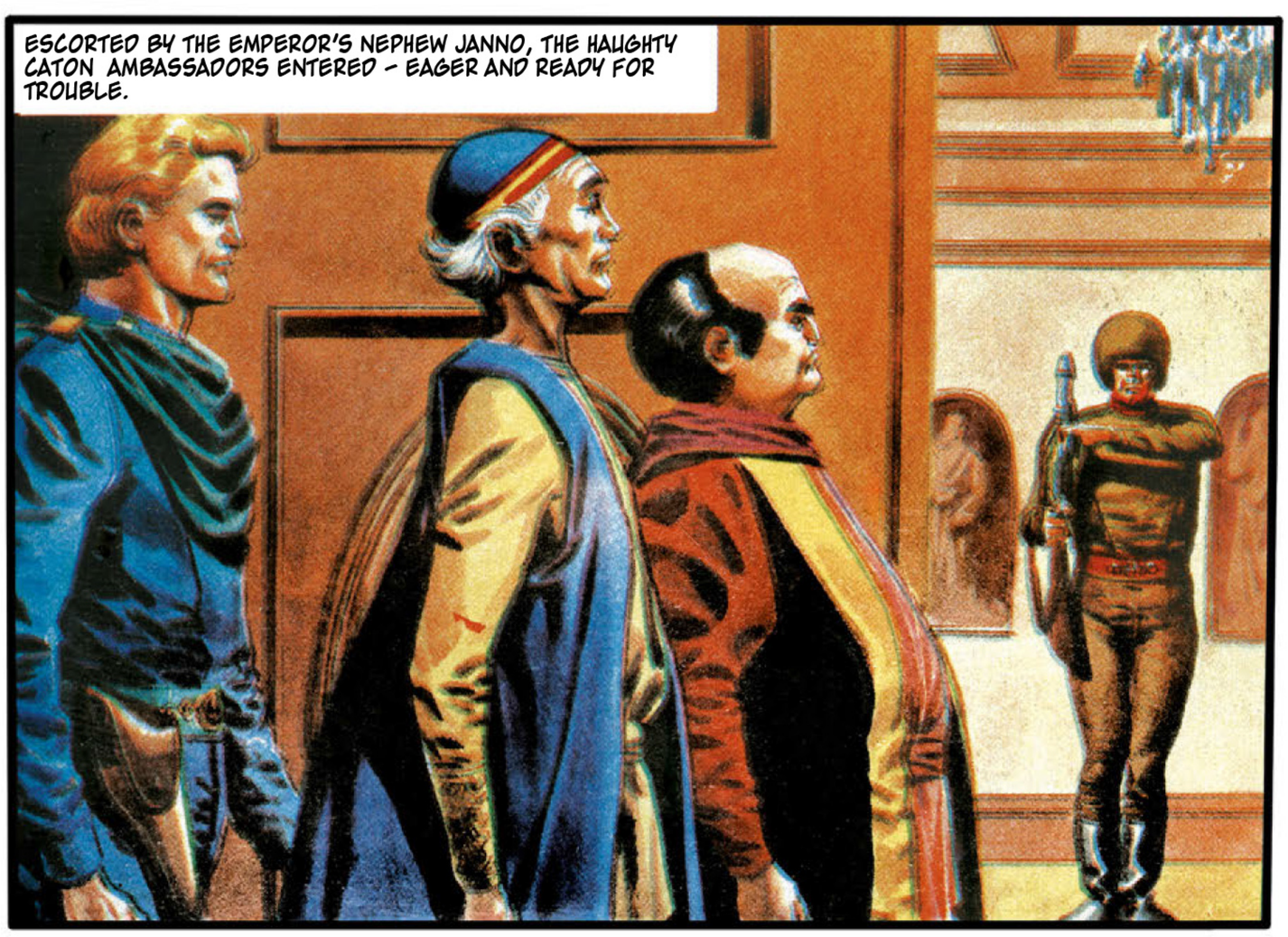

THE SECOND MYSTERY DISASTER WAS BROUGHT ABOUT BY A SCIENTIST NAMED RICCO. HE WORKED IN THE IMPERIAL SCIENCE LABORATORIES. ONE MORNING, HE BROUGHT TWO HIGHLY UNSTABLE CHEMICALS INTO CLOSE PROXIMITY.

...THEN SWIFTLY WALKED OUT OF THE BUILDING.

HIS FACE WAS BLANK. IT REMAINED BLANK, AND HE NEVER SO MUCH AS LOOKED BACK – WHEN THE IMPERIAL SCIENCE LABORATORIES WERE RIVEN BY A SHATTERING EXPLOSION!

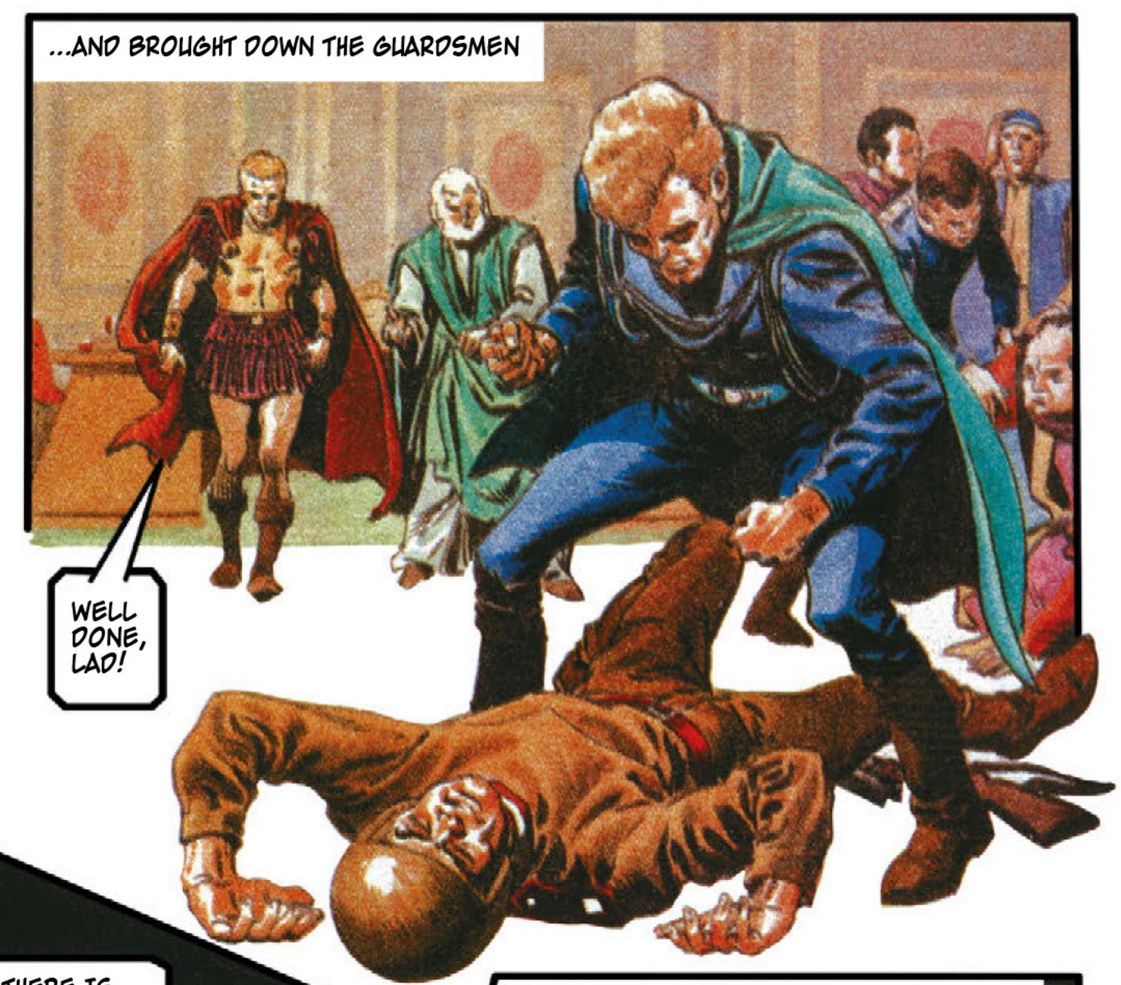

THREE DAYS LATER, WITH THE DISASTERS STILL UNEXPLAINED, THE EMPEROR TRIGO WAS ADDRESSING HIS COUNCIL ON ANOTHER MATTER OF GREAT GRAVITY.
GENTLEMEN! I DO NOT HAVE TO WARN YOU THAT THE MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN OURSELVES AND CATO COULD LEAD TO WAR. I WARN YOU TO TREAT CATON AMBASSADORS WITH GREAT TACT AND COURTESY, SO THAT WE CAN SETTLE OUR DIFFERENCES!

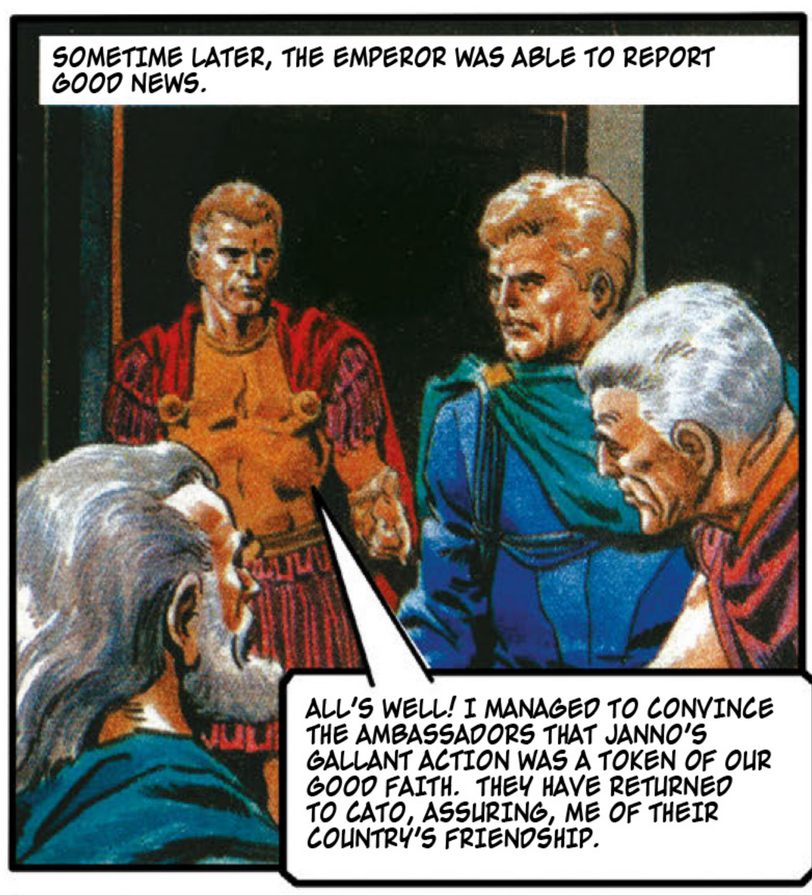

THE DOORS OF THE COUNCIL CHAMBER SWUNG OPEN.
IMPERIAL MAJESTY! EXCELLENCIES! ... THE NOBLE AMBASSADORS FROM CATO!
REMEMBER! ONE UNGUARDED WORD COULD LEAD TO WAR!

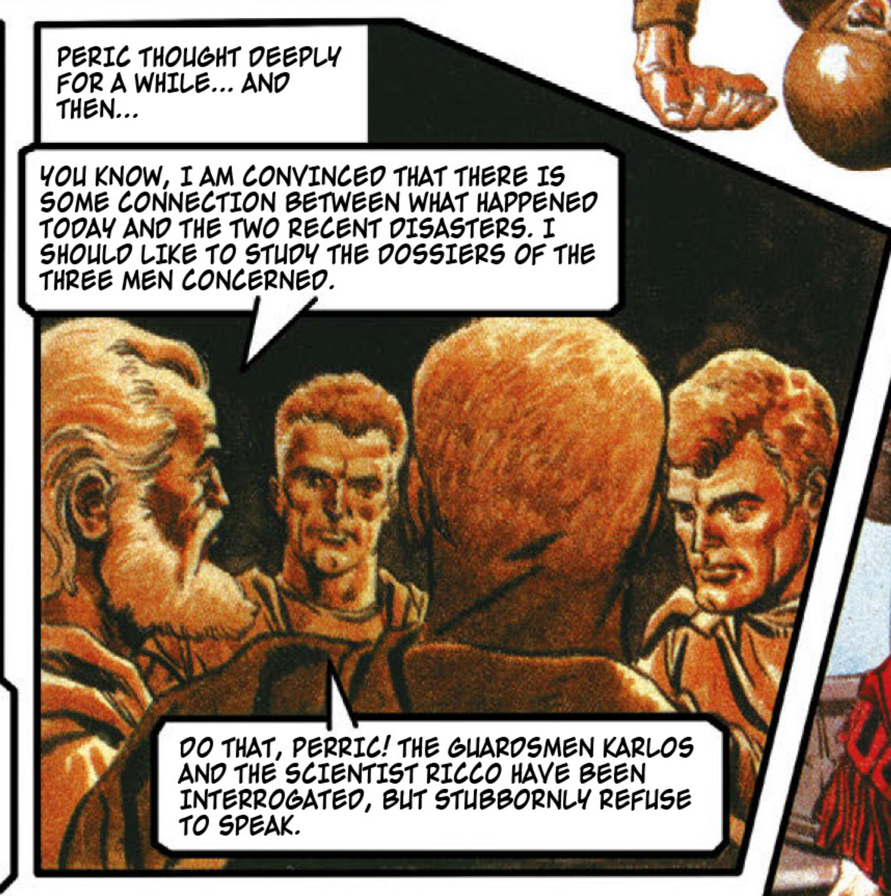

ESCORTED BY THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW JANNO, THE HAUGHTY CATON AMBASSADORS ENTERED – EAGER AND READY FOR TROUBLE.

THEY FOUND TROUBLE SOON ENOUGH! THE GUARDSMEN ON THE DOOR BROUGHT DOWN HIS WEAPON... AND ...

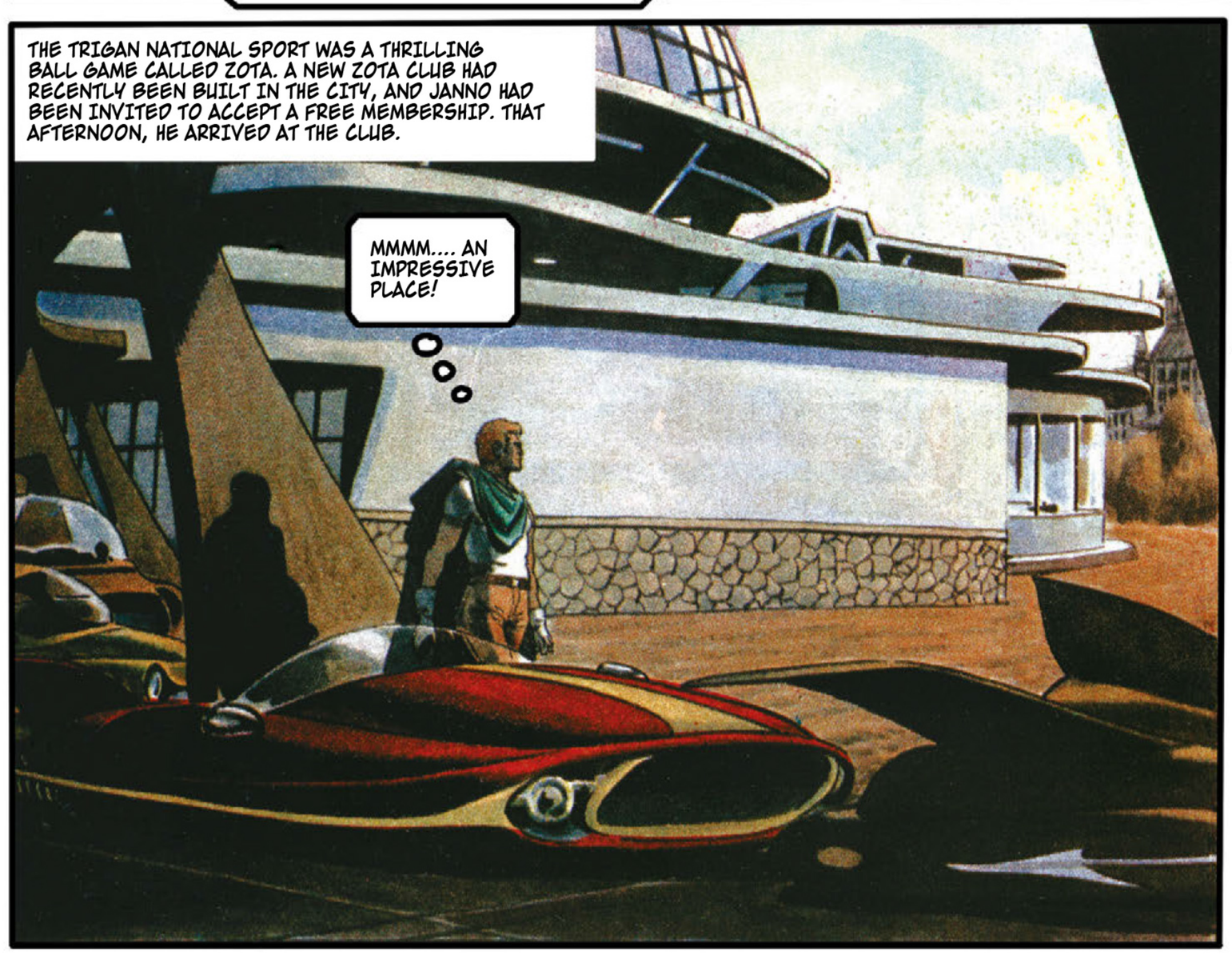
WITH A SWEEP OF HIS ARM, JANNO SENT TWO AMBASSADORS SPRAWLING TO THE FLOOR. THEN HE DIVED UNDER THE HAIL OF PROJECTILES...


...AND BROUGHT DOWN THE GUARDSMEN
WELL DONE, LAD!


SOMETIME LATER, THE EMPEROR WAS ABLE TO REPORT GOOD NEWS.
ALL'S WELL! I MANAGED TO CONVINCE THE AMBASSADORS THAT JANNO'S GALLANT ACTION WAS A TOKEN OF OUR GOOD FAITH. THEY HAVE RETURNED TO CATO, ASSURING, ME OF THEIR COUNTRY'S FRIENDSHIP.

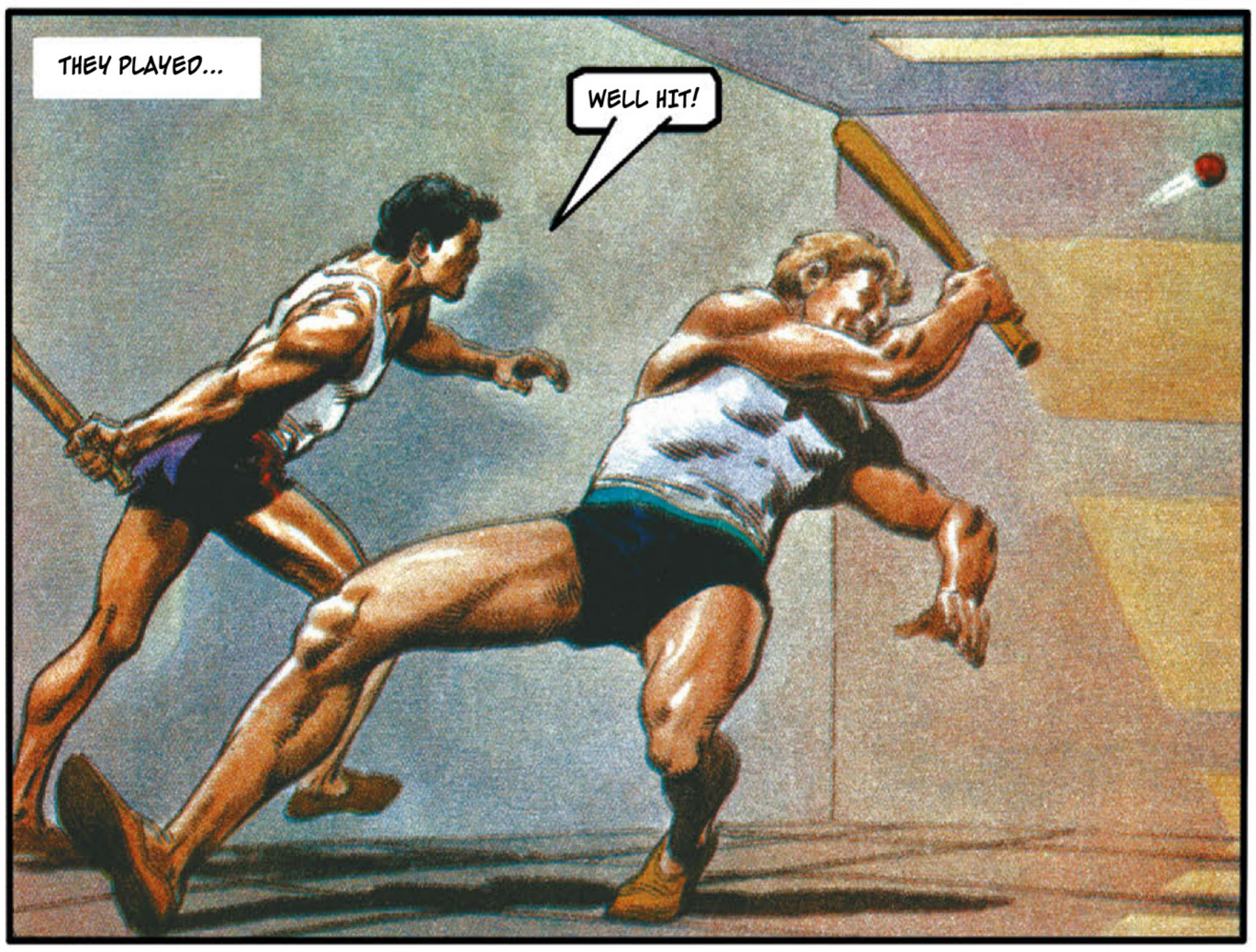

PERIC THOUGHT DEEPLY FOR A WHILE... AND THEN...
YOU KNOW, I AM CONVINCED THAT THERE IS SOME CONNECTION BETWEEN WHAT HAPPENED TODAY AND THE TWO RECENT DISASTERS. I SHOULD LIKE TO STUDY THE DOSSIERS OF THE THREE MEN CONCERNED.
DO THAT, PERRIC! THE GUARDSMEN KARLOS AND THE SCIENTIST RICCO HAVE BEEN INTERROGATED, BUT STUBBORNLY REFUSE TO SPEAK.

AS THEY PARTED, TRIGO HAD A WORD WITH HIS NEPHEW.
AGAIN, JANNO – MY THANKS FOR WHAT YOU DID TODAY! TELL ME, ARE YOU JOINING US IN THE ZARGOT HUNT THIS AFTERNOON?
SORRY, UNCLE, BUT I HAVE ALREADY ARRANGED MY AFTERNOON SPORT.


THE TRIGAN NATIONAL SPORT WAS A THRILLING BALL GAME CALLED ZOTA. A NEW ZOTA CLUB HAD RECENTLY BEEN BUILT IN THE CITY, AND JANNO HAD BEEN INVITED TO ACCEPT A FREE MEMBERSHIP. THAT AFTERNOON, HE ARRIVED AT THE CLUB.
MMMM.... AN IMPRESSIVE PLACE!

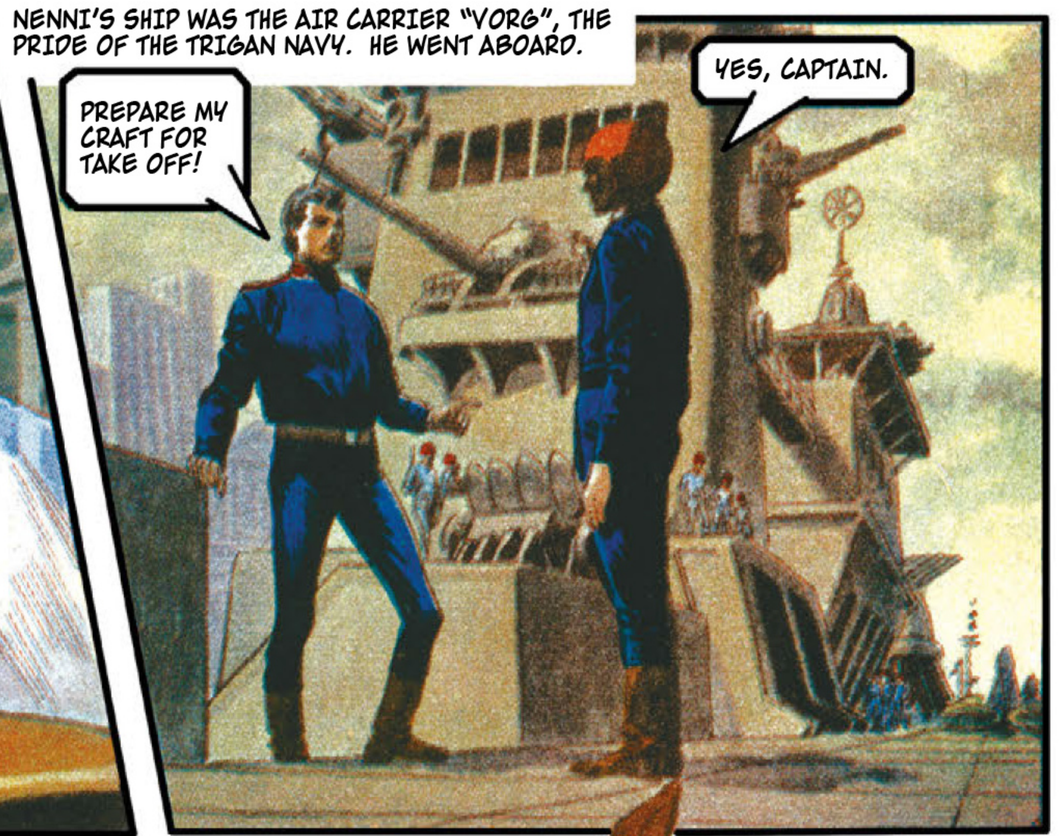
AS THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW, HE WAS GREETED WITH GREAT RESPECT.
LORD JANNO, IF YOU WISH TO PLAY NOW, MAY I INTRODUCE CAPTAIN NENNI, WHO IS WAITING FOR A GAME.
I'LL TRY TO GIVE YOU A GOOD GAME.
DON'T TRY TOO HARD – I'M BADLY OUT OF PRACTICE!

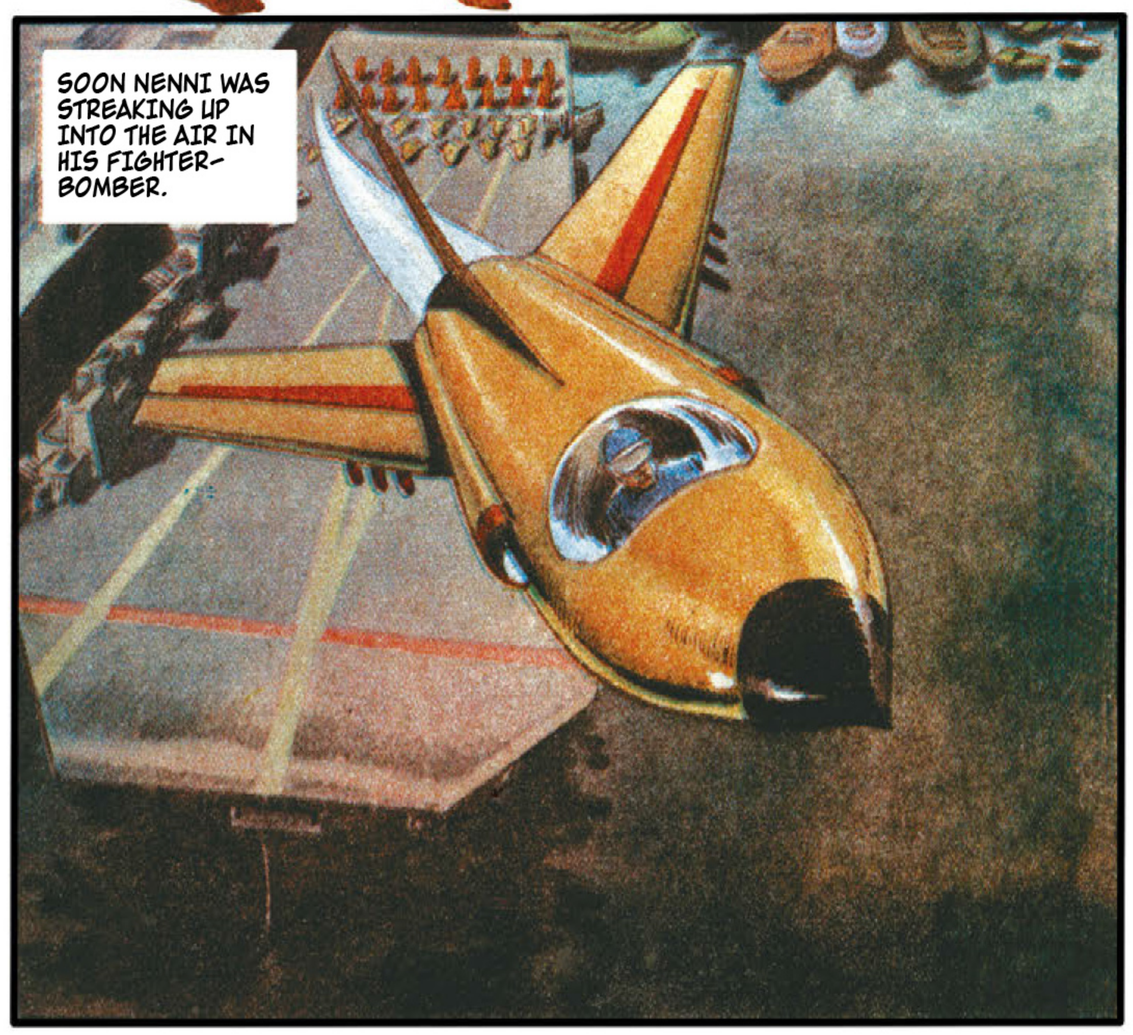
NENNI WORE THE UNIFORM OF A NAVAL AIR PILOT. THE TWO YOUNG OFFICERS SHOOK HANDS.


THEY PLAYED...
WELL HIT!

...AND JANNO WON.
YOU MUST GIVE ME A CHANCE OF REVENGE.
WILLINGLY! SHALL WE SAY TOMORROW?

ELEKTON'S TWIN SUNS WERE DIPPING TOWARDS THE HORIZON AS THE TWO PARTED COMPANY AND CAPTAIN NENNI DROVE AWAY. IT WAS THEN THAT A STRANGE EXPRESSION PASSED OVER THE NAVAL PILOT'S FACE.
THE – TIME – HAS – COME!


NENNI'S SHIP WAS THE AIR CARRIER "VORG", THE PRIDE OF THE TRIGAN NAVY. HE WENT ABOARD.
PREPARE MY CRAFT FOR TAKE OFF!
YES, CAPTAIN.


SOON NENNI WAS STREAKING UP INTO THE AIR IN HIS FIGHTER-BOMBER.

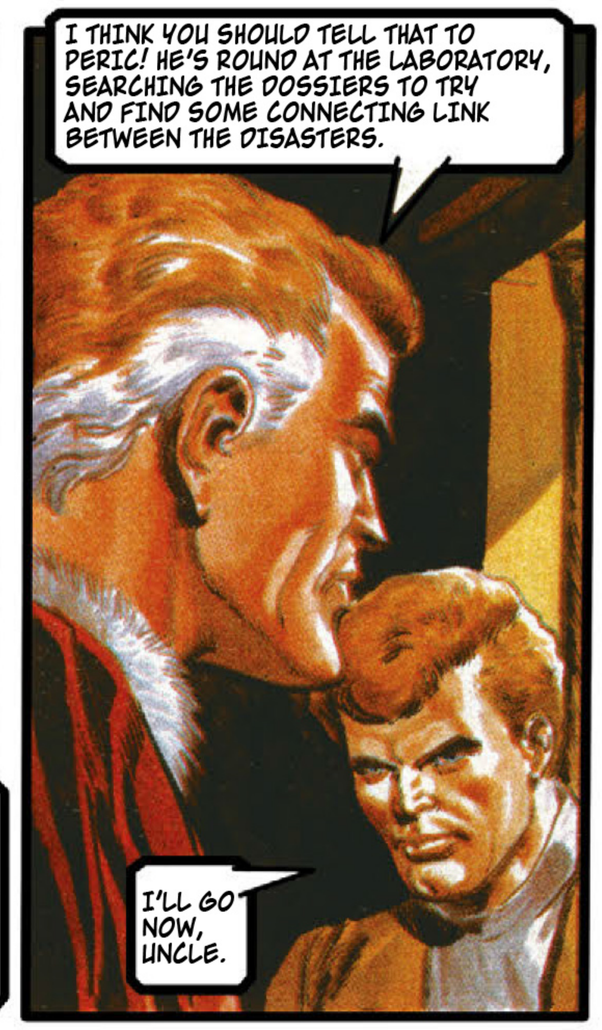
THEN HE DIVED!
AND A DEADLY BLACK SHAPE PLUMMETED FROM THE CRAFT – STRAIGHT FOR THE "VORG'S" DECK!

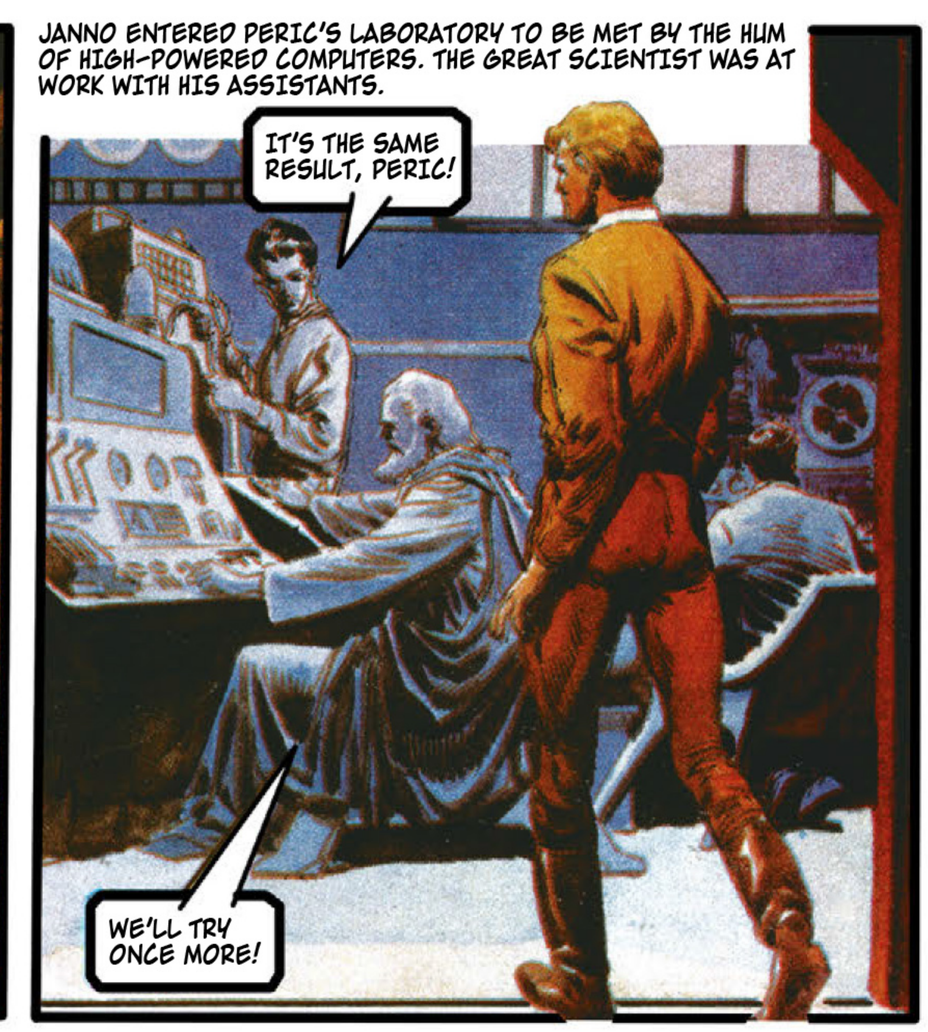
CAPTAIN NENNI'S BOMB STRUCK THE CARRIER IN THE CENTRE OF ITS DECK. THERE WAS A RENDING EXPLOSION!

THE PRIDE OF THE TRIGAN NAVY BLEW UP – DESTROYING THE CRAFT WHICH HAD DESTROYED IT, LIKE AN INSECT CAUGHT IN A FLAME.

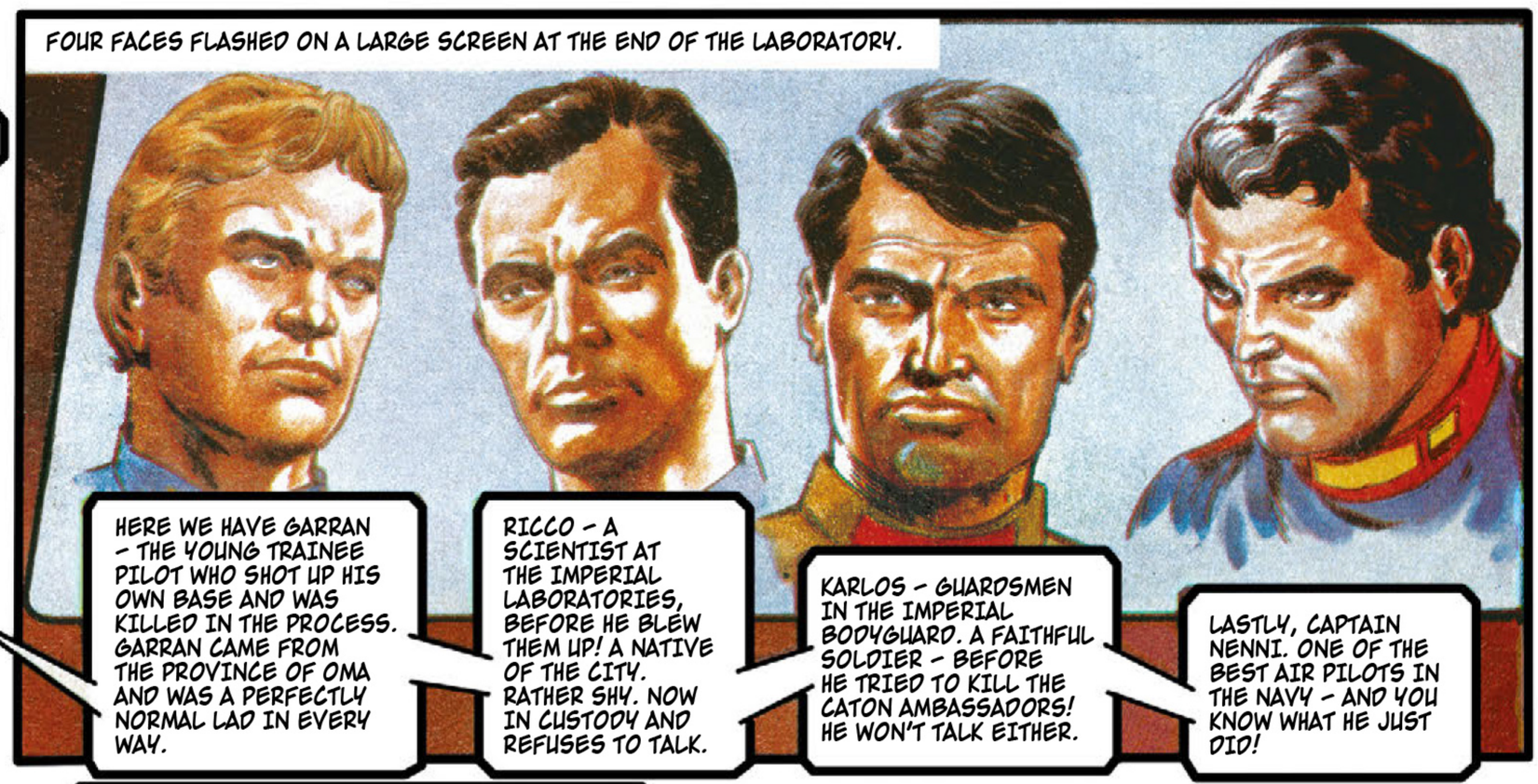
BY THE GREATEST GOOD FORTUNE, MOST OF "VORG'S" CREW WERE ASHORE ON LEAVE. IN THE HOURS THAT FOLLOWED, EVERY CRAFT IN THE HARBOUR SEARCHED FOR SURVIVORS.

THE EMPEROR TRIGO WAS AGHAST TO HEAR OF THE TRAGEDY... AND SO WAS HIS NEPHEW JANNO
ONE DISASTER AFTER ANOTHER! WHAT CAN BE BEHIND IT ALL?
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT, UNCLE! I PLAYED A GAME OF ZOTA WITH CAPTAIN NENNI ONLY A SHORT WHILE BEFORE HE DESTROYED HIS OWN SHIP - AND HE WAS PERFECTLY NORMAL THEN!


I THINK YOU SHOULD TELL THAT TO PERIC! HE'S ROUND AT THE LABORATORY, SEARCHING THE DOSSIERS TO TRY AND FIND SOME CONNECTING LINK BETWEEN THE DISASTERS.
I'LL GO NOW, UNCLE.


JANNO ENTERED PERIC'S LABORATORY TO BE MET BY THE HUM OF HIGH-POWERED COMPUTERS. THE GREAT SCIENTIST WAS AT WORK WITH HIS ASSISTANTS.
IT'S THE SAME RESULT, PERIC!
WE'LL TRY ONCE MORE!

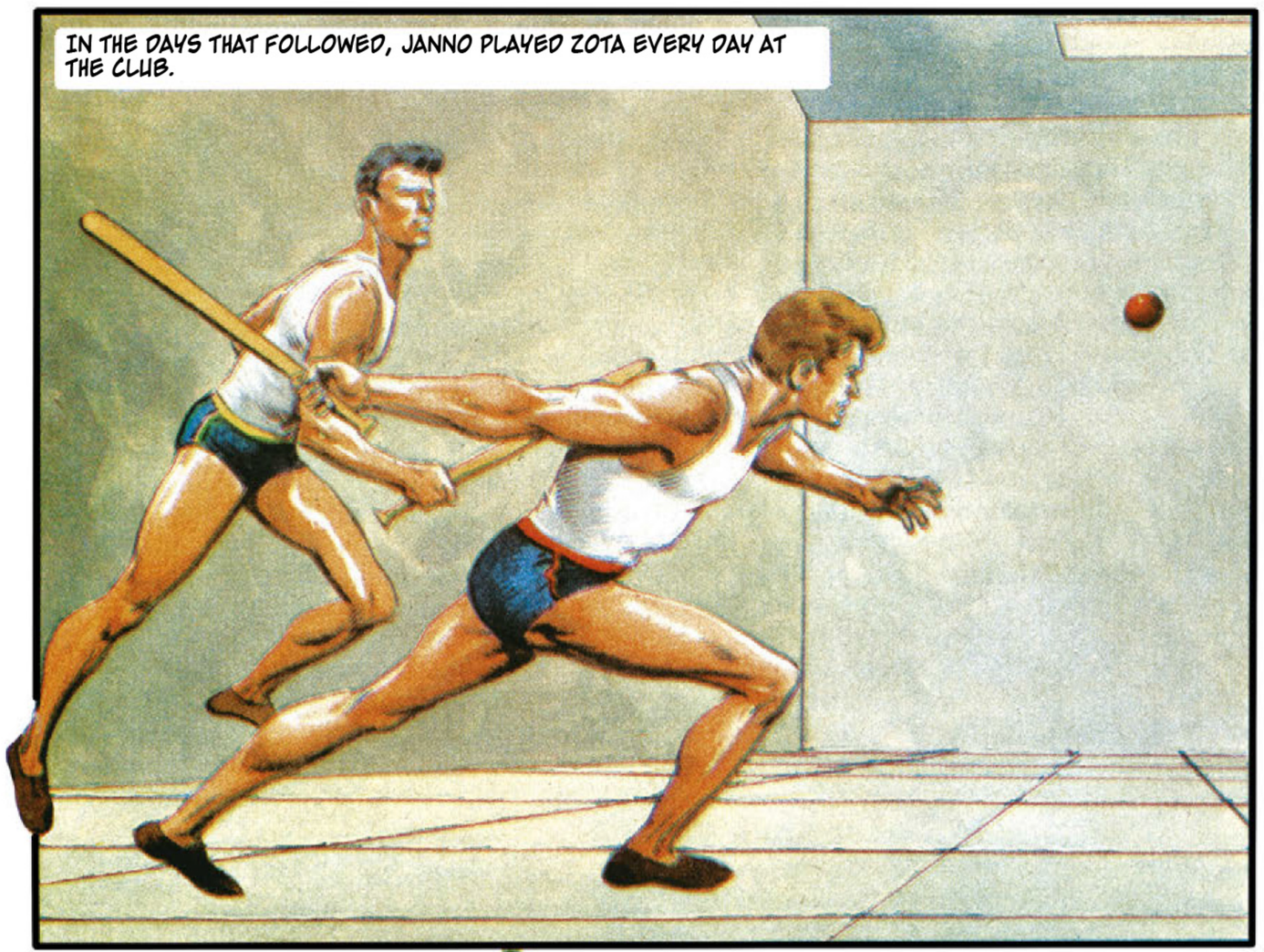
JANNO WATCHED THEM OPERATE THE GIANT ELECTRONIC BRAIN AGAIN. AND THEN...
THE SAME!
VERY INTERESTING!
WATCH THIS, JANNO!

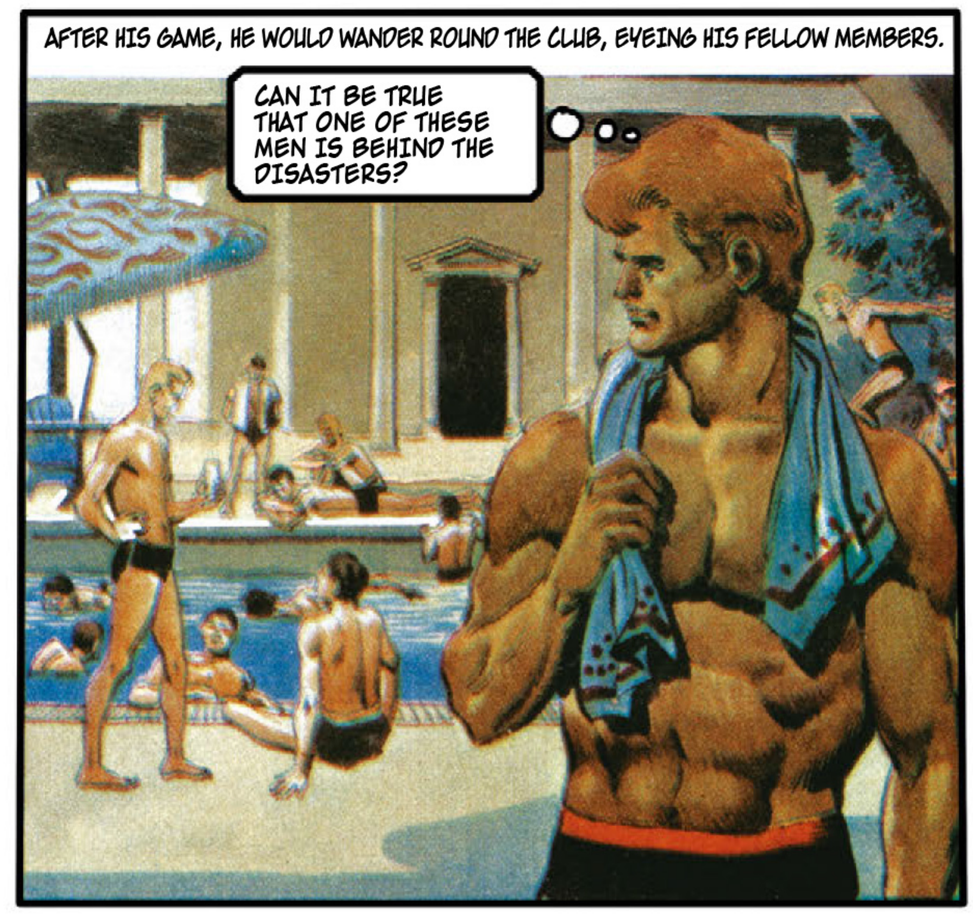

FOUR FACES FLASHED ON A LARGE SCREEN AT THE END OF THE LABORATORY.
HERE WE HAVE GARRAN - THE YOUNG TRAINEE PILOT WHO SHOT UP HIS OWN BASE AND WAS KILLED IN THE PROCESS. GARRAN CAME FROM THE PROVINCE OF OMA AND WAS A PERFECTLY NORMAL LAD IN EVERY WAY.
RICCO - A SCIENTIST AT THE IMPERIAL LABORATORIES, BEFORE HE BLEW THEM UP! A NATIVE OF THE CITY. RATHER SHY. NOW IN CUSTODY AND REFUSES TO TALK.
KARLOS - GUARDSMEN IN THE IMPERIAL BODYGUARD. A FAITHFUL SOLDIER - BEFORE HE TRIED TO KILL THE CATON AMBASSADORS! HE WON'T TALK EITHER.
LASTLY, CAPTAIN NENNI. ONE OF THE BEST AIR PILOTS IN THE NAVY - AND YOU KNOW WHAT HE JUST DID!

PERIC CONTINUED - AND A SHOCK OF HORROR TRAILED AN ICY FINGER DOWN JANNO'S SPINE.
WE HAVE PUT THE DOSSIERS OF THOSE FOUR MEN THROUGH THE COMPUTER FIVE TIMES, AND THE FOUR HAD ONLY ONE COMMON FACTOR - THEY HAD ALL RECENTLY BEEN GIVEN FREE MEMBERSHIP OF THE TRIGAN ZOTA CLUB!
WHA-A-A-AT?

BUT - I, TOO, WAS RECENTLY GIVEN A FREE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CLUB!
WERE YOU NOW? IT'S OBVIOUSLY A CONSPIRACY! FOR REASONS OF HIS OWN, SOMEONE USED THOSE FOUR MEN TO CAUSE THE DISASTERS - AND HE OBVIOUSLY MET THEM AT THE ZOTA CLUB!

AND IT SEEMS TO ME, THAT OUR UNKNOWN CONSPIRATOR MAY BE PLANNING TO USE YOU ALSO, JANNO!

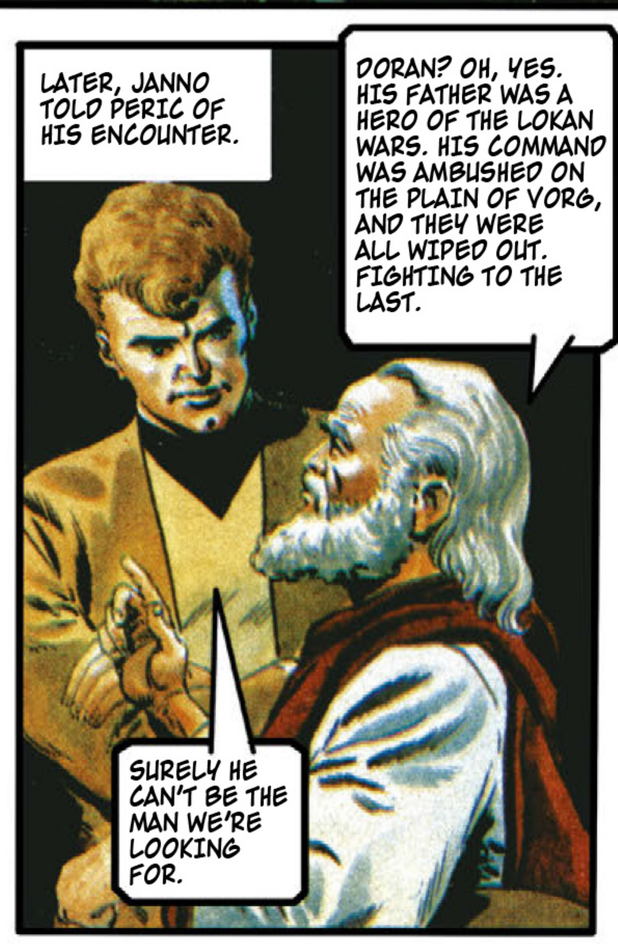

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, JANNO PLAYED ZOTA EVERY DAY AT THE CLUB.


AFTER HIS GAME, HE WOULD WANDER ROUND THE CLUB, EYEING HIS FELLOW MEMBERS.
CAN IT BE TRUE THAT ONE OF THESE MEN IS BEHIND THE DISASTERS?

ON THE FOURTH DAY, SOMEONE CAME UP TO HIM.
YOU DON'T REMEMBER ME, PERHAPS. MY NAME IS DORAN, AND MY FATHER WAS A COLONEL IN THE IMPERIAL GUARD. YOU AND I PLAYED TOGETHER AS BOYS.
DORAN – OF COURSE, I REMEMBER YOU WELL.

JANNO HAD NOT SEEN HIS OLD PLAYMATE FOR MANY YEARS.
PERHAPS YOU WILL DINE WITH ME AT MY VILLA THIS EVENING, AND WE CAN TALK OVER OLD TIMES.
WITH THE GREATEST PLEASURE.

AFTER THIS MEETING, JANNO WENT STRAIGHT TO PERIC'S LABORATORY. THE GREAT SCIENTIST WAS BUSY.
SOMETHING HAPPENED AT THE CLUB – BUT IT MAY NOT BE IMPORTANT.
GIVE ME A FEW MOMENTS, JANNO – THIS EXPERIMENT IS IN A RATHER CRITICAL STATE.

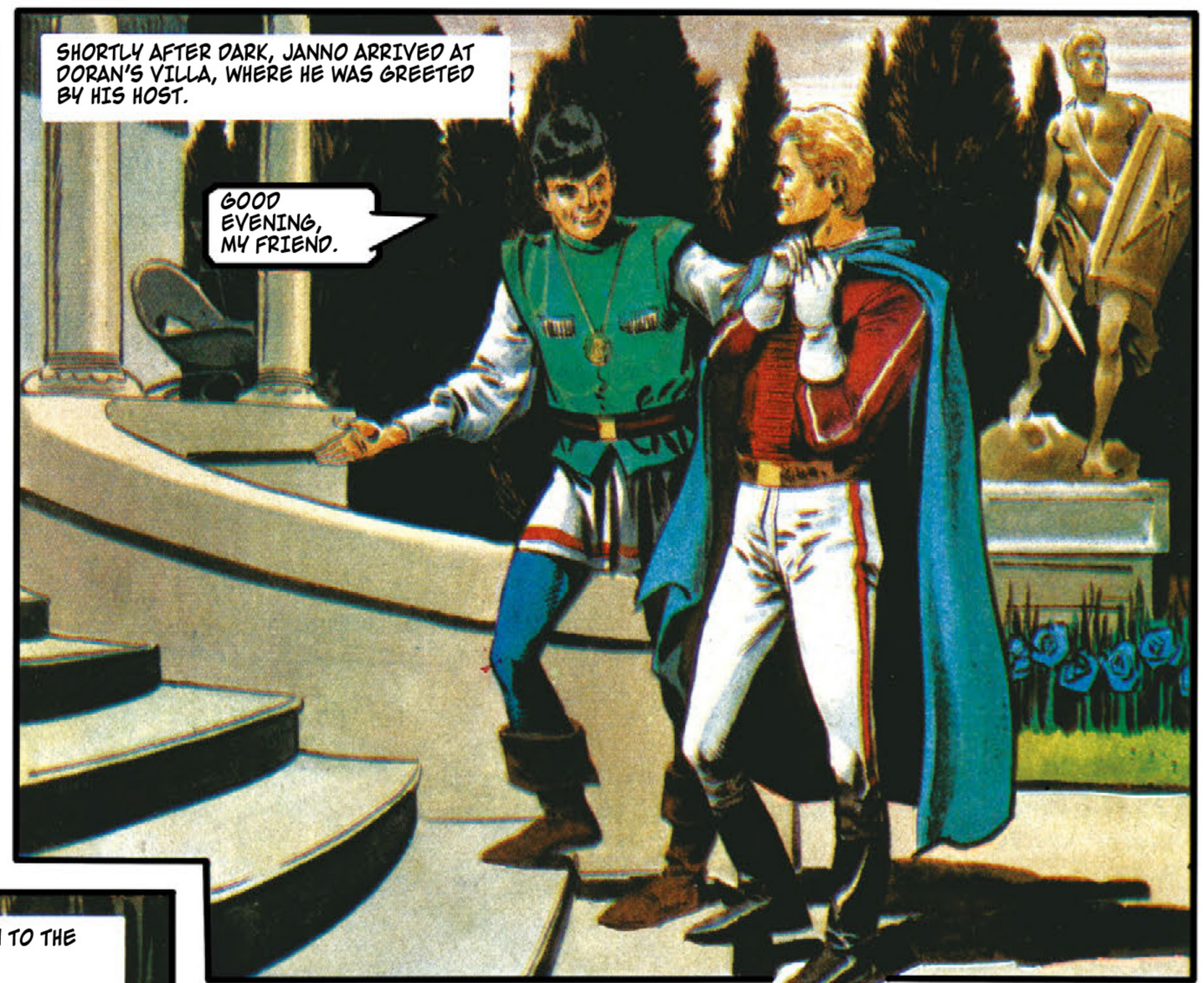

LATER, JANNO TOLD PERIC OF HIS ENCOUNTER.
DORAN? OH, YES. HIS FATHER WAS A HERO OF THE LOKAN WARS. HIS COMMAND WAS AMBUSHED ON THE PLAIN OF VORG, AND THEY WERE ALL WIPED OUT. FIGHTING TO THE LAST.
SURELY HE CAN'T BE THE MAN WE'RE LOOKING FOR.

BEFORE PERIC COULD COMMENT, THERE WAS AN OMINOUS BILLOW OF SMOKE FROM THE APPARATUS ON THE BENCH.
GET OUT OF HERE! THE THING'S GOING TO EXPLODE!

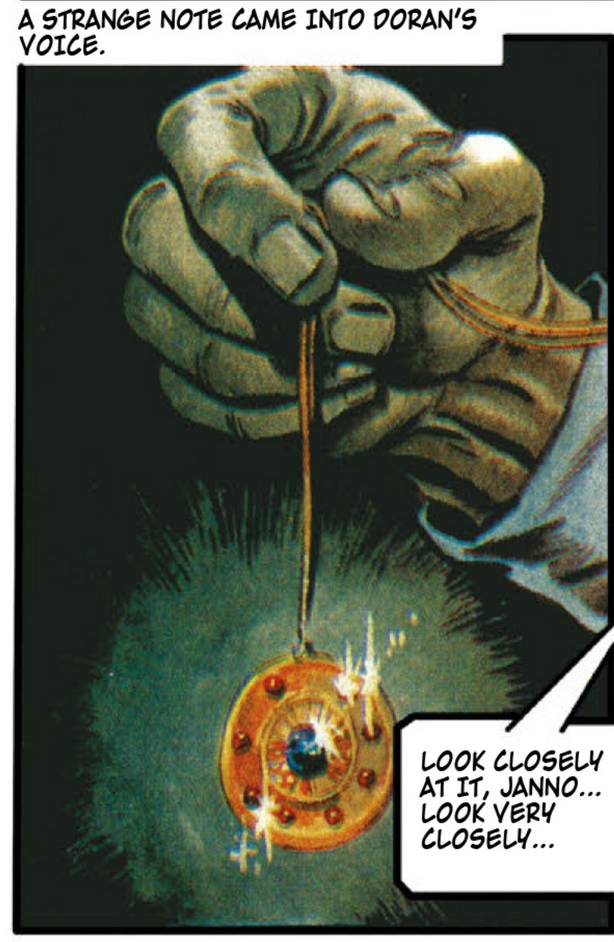
THEY WERE HALF WAY TO THE DOOR WHEN A SEARING STAB OF FLAME SHOT ACROSS THE LABORATORY!
AAAAH!

THERE WAS LITTLE DAMAGE DONE. BUT...
I CAN HARDLY SEE!
THAT IS CAUSED BY THE Z-RAYS FROM THE DISINTEGRATING PARTICLES. YOU ARE SUFFERING FROM PART BLINDNESS, BUT YOUR SIGHT WILL BE PERFECTLY ALL RIGHT BY TOMORROW.

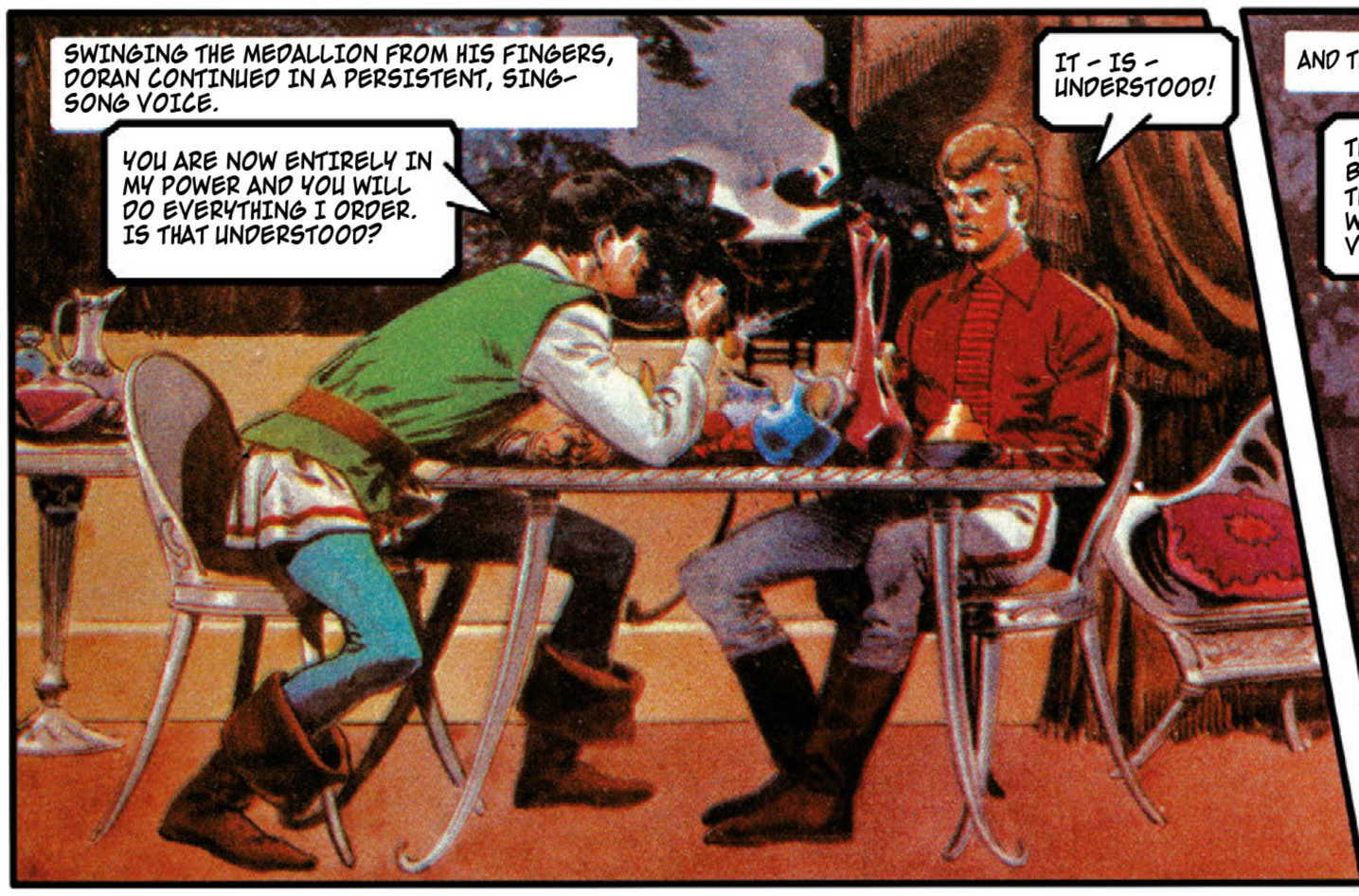
I HOPE I CAN SEE WELL ENOUGH TO GET TO DORAN'S VILLA THIS EVENING.
YOU WILL. WHILE YOU ARE THERE, LEARN ALL YOU CAN ABOUT HIM. AND BE CAREFUL! IF HE IS BEHIND THE DISASTERS, HE IS A DANGEROUS MAN!


SHORTLY AFTER DARK, JANNO ARRIVED AT DORAN'S VILLA, WHERE HE WAS GREETED BY HIS HOST.
GOOD EVENING, MY FRIEND.

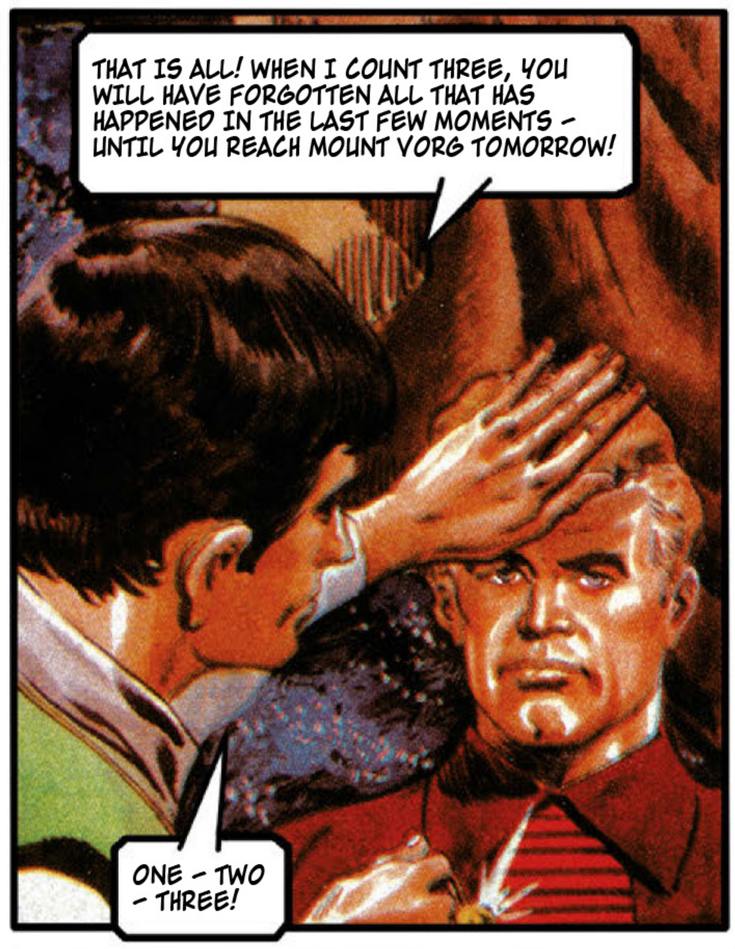
THEY DINED ALONE. AND DURING THE MEAL, DORAN DREW ATTENTION TO THE MEDALLION THAT HUNG AROUND HIS NECK.
THIS IS INTERESTING JANNO. IT WAS GIVEN TO ME BY MY FATHER...

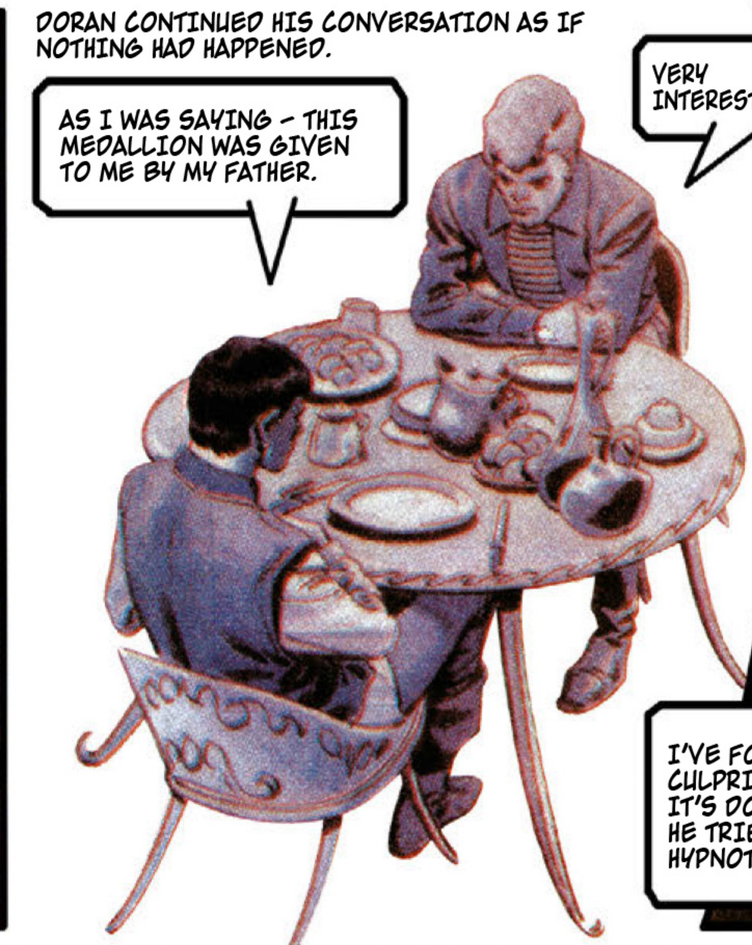

A STRANGE NOTE CAME INTO DORAN'S VOICE.
LOOK CLOSELY AT IT, JANNO... LOOK VERY CLOSELY...

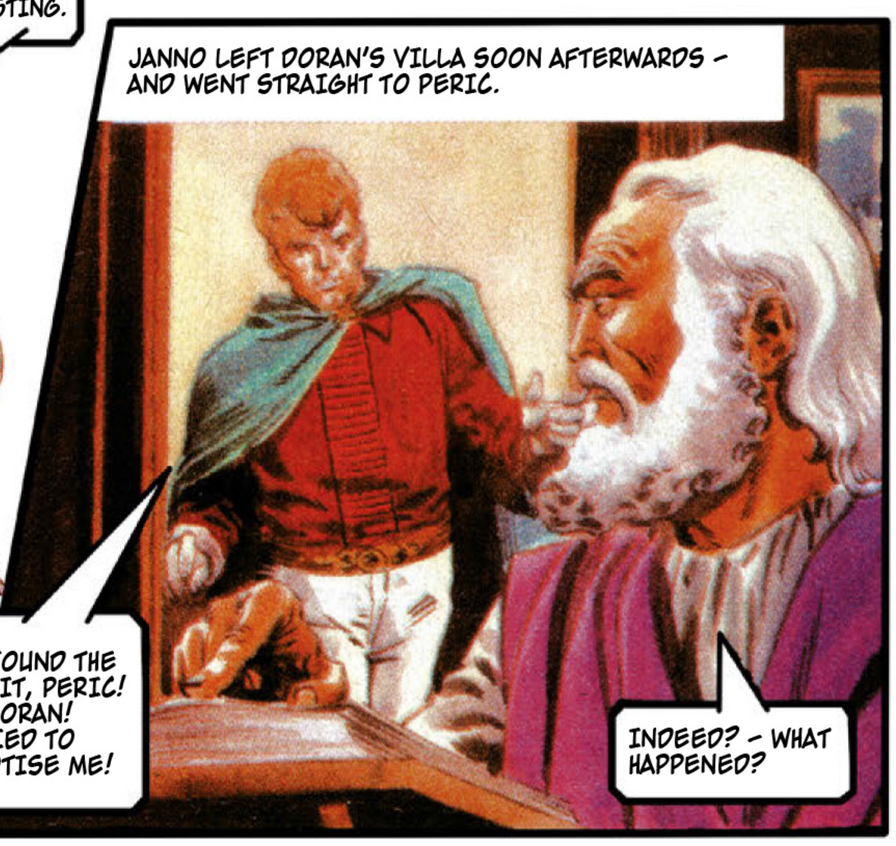
YOU ARE GETTING VERY SLEEPY, JANNO...VERY SLEEPY... YOUR SENSES ARE SLIPPING AWAY...


SWINGING THE MEDALLION FROM HIS FINGERS, DORAN CONTINUED IN A PERSISTENT, SING-SONG VOICE.
YOU ARE NOW ENTIRELY IN MY POWER AND YOU WILL DO EVERYTHING I ORDER. IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?
IT - IS - UNDERSTOOD!

AND THEN - THE ASTOUNDING ORDER!
THE EMPEROR IS YOUR ENEMY! REMEMBER THAT! HE MUST BE ELIMINATED! TOMORROW, WHEN YOU FLY ESCORT TO THE IMPERIAL CRAFT THAT IS TO TAKE HIM TO CATO, YOU WILL COLLIDE WITH THE IMPERIAL CRAFT OVER MOUNT VORG!


THAT IS ALL! WHEN I COUNT THREE, YOU WILL HAVE FORGOTTEN ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE LAST FEW MOMENTS - UNTIL YOU REACH MOUNT VORG TOMORROW!
ONE - TWO - THREE!

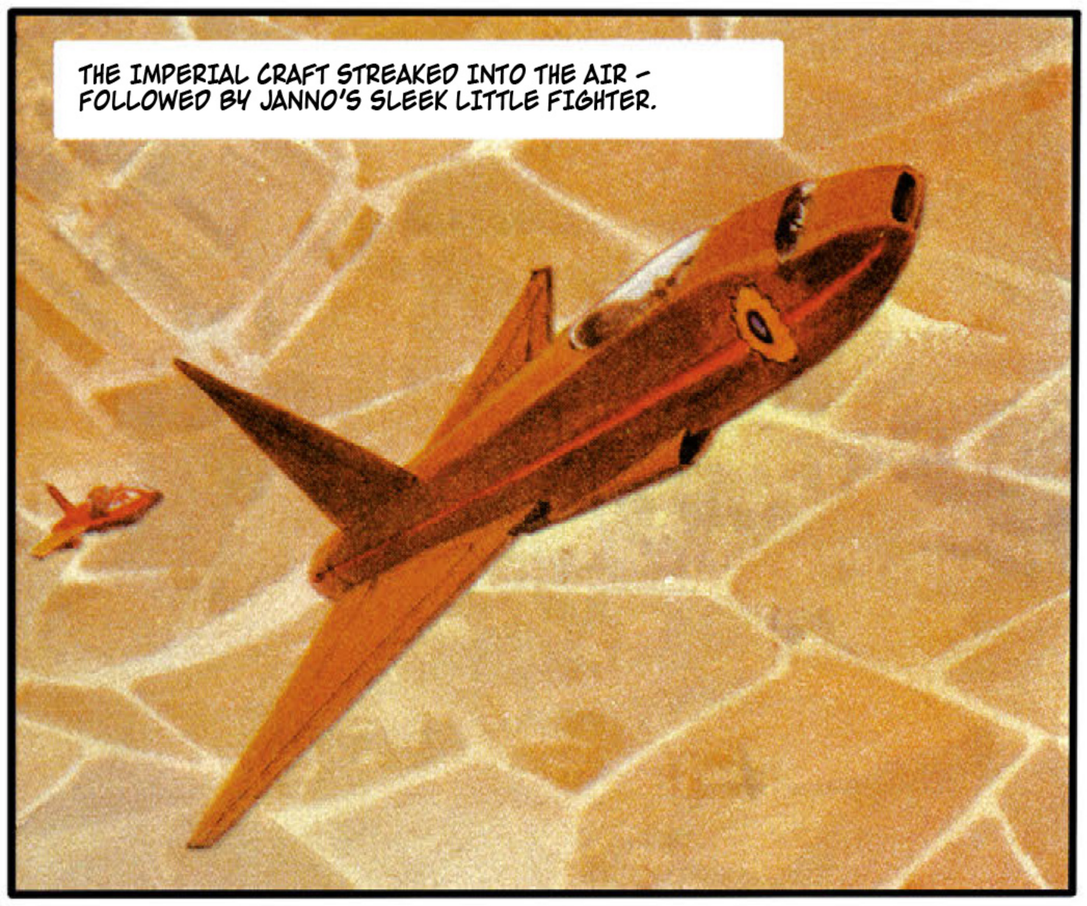

DORAN CONTINUED HIS CONVERSATION AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.
AS I WAS SAYING - THIS MEDALLION WAS GIVEN TO ME BY MY FATHER.
VERY INTERESTING.


JANNO LEFT DORAN'S VILLA SOON AFTERWARDS - AND WENT STRAIGHT TO PERIC.
I'VE FOUND THE CULPRIT, PERIC! IT'S DORAN! HE TRIED TO HYPNOTISE ME!
INDEED? - WHAT HAPPENED?

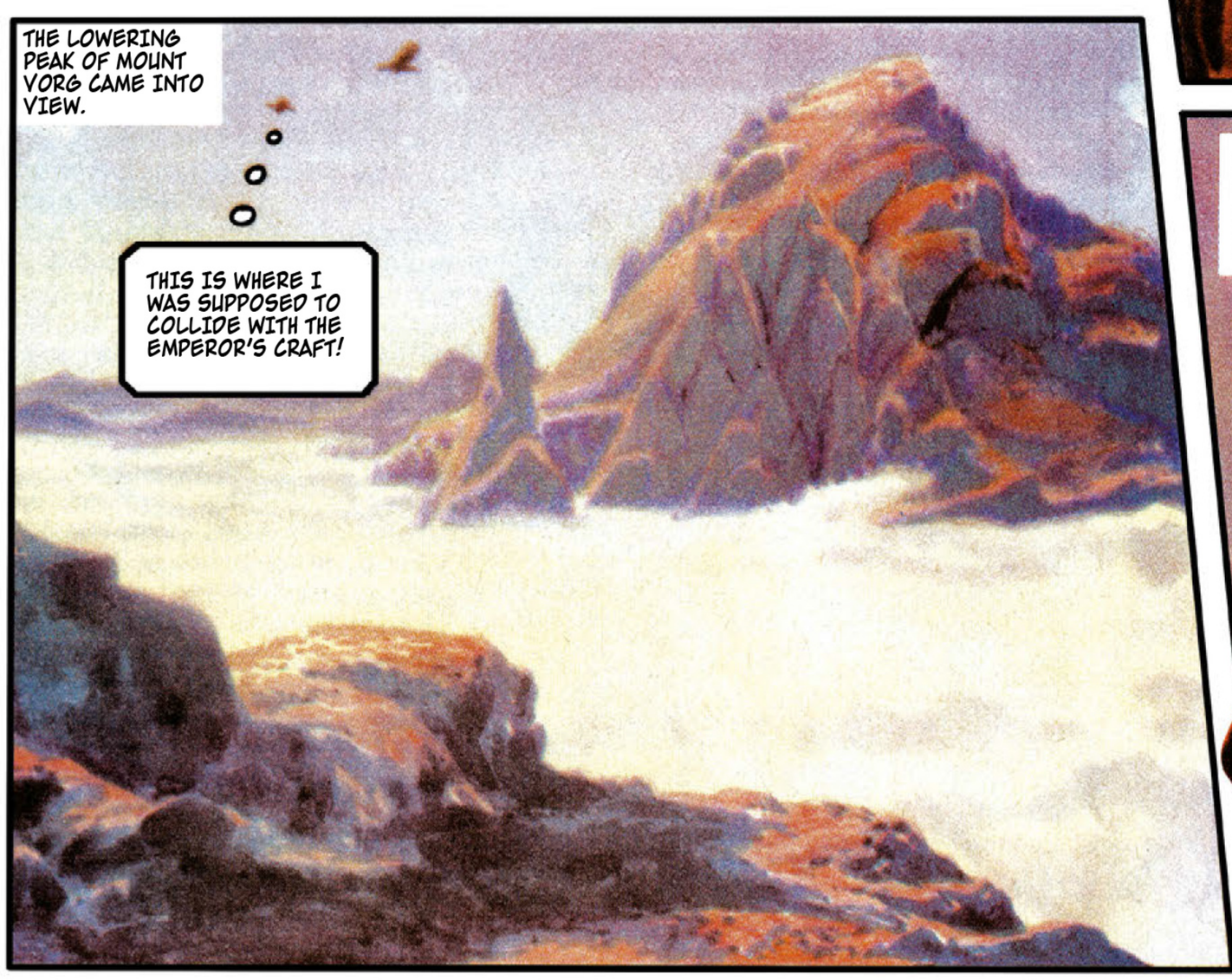
JANNO TOLD ALL THAT HAD PASSED BETWEEN HIM AND DORAN.
IT WAS FORTUNATE THAT THE SLIGHT ACCIDENT IN MY LABORATORY TEMPORARILY HALF-BLINDED YOU, SO THAT YOU DID NOT RESPOND TO THE MEDALLION UPON WHICH THE FIEND WAS DIRECTING YOUR ATTENTION!
BUT I FOOLED HIM INTO BELIEVING THAT HE HAD HYPNOTISED ME, AND THAT I SHALL SMASH INTO THE EMPEROR'S CRAFT TOMORROW!

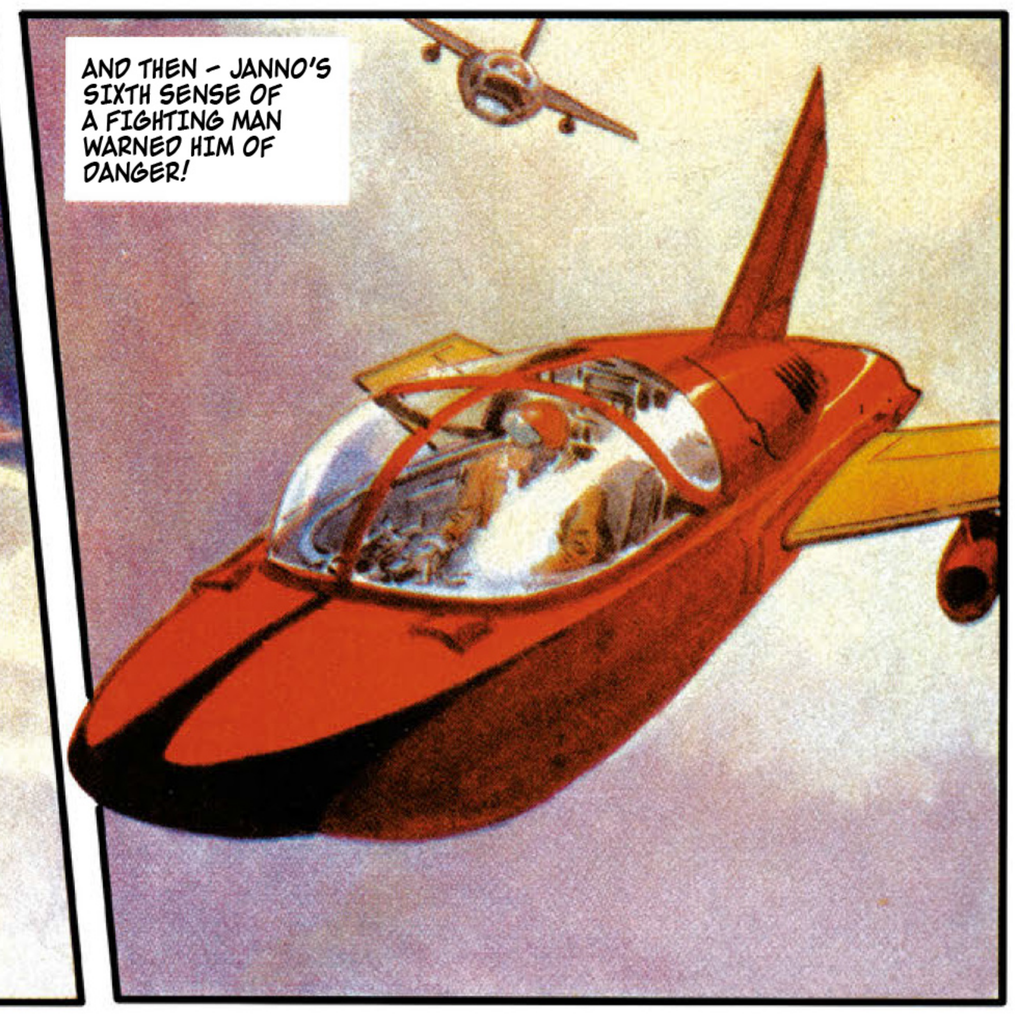
WHAT DO WE DO - HAVE HIM ARRESTED AT ONCE?
I THINK NOT! BETTER TO GET THE EMPEROR SAFELY OUT OF THE CITY. ONCE YOU HAVE ESCORTED HIM SAFELY TO CATO, I WILL HAVE DORAN TAKEN INTO CUSTODY.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, THE EMPEROR TRIGO BOARDED HIS CRAFT FOR A STATE VISIT TO CATO.


THE IMPERIAL CRAFT STREAKED INTO THE AIR – FOLLOWED BY JANNO'S SLEEK LITTLE FIGHTER.

JANNO TOOK UP STATION ABOVE AND BEHIND THE OTHER CRAFT – AND SMILED TO HIMSELF.
THAT SCOUNDREL DORAN IS GOING TO RECEIVE AN UNPLEASANT SHOCK ANY TIME NOW!

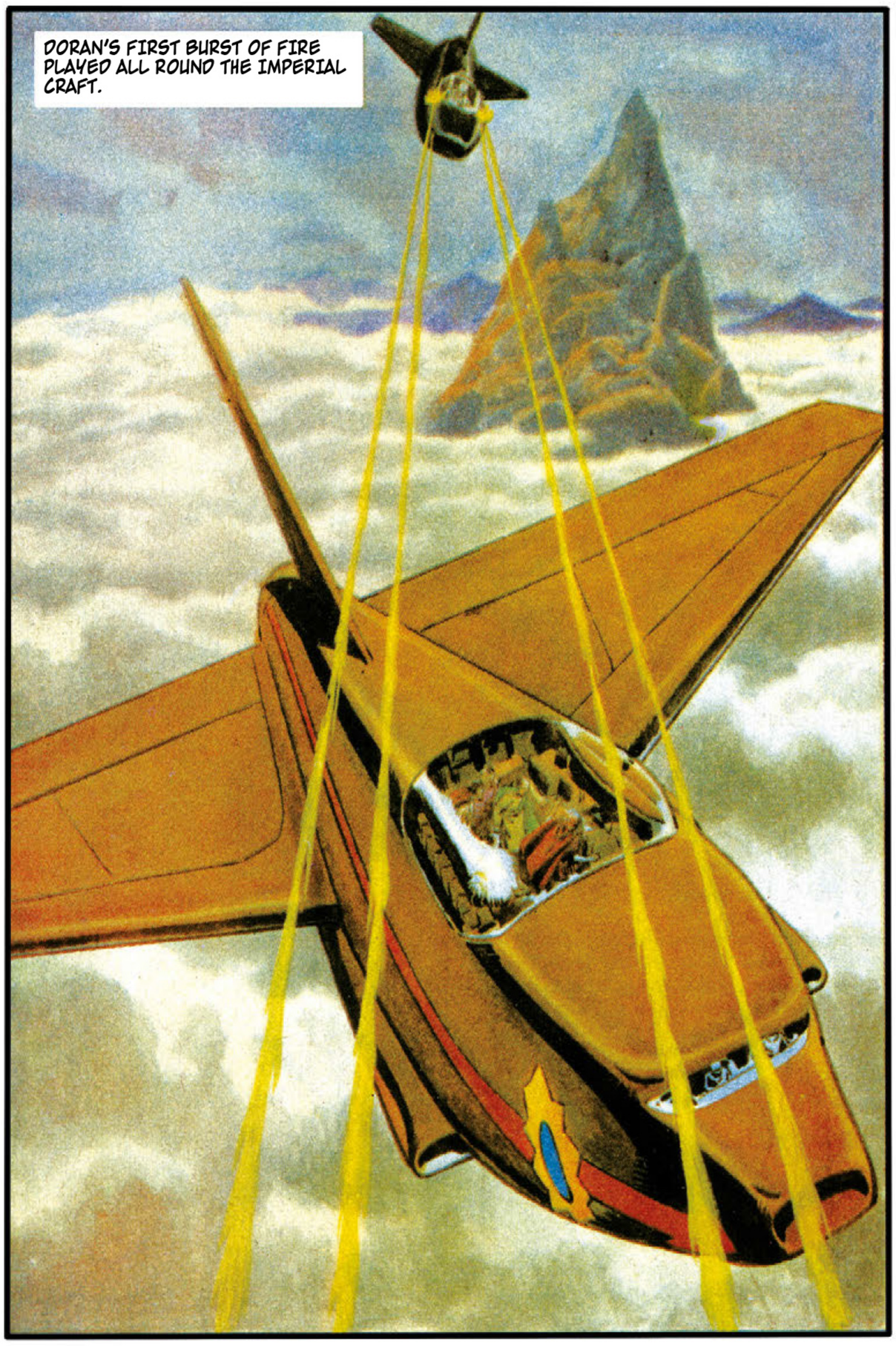

THE LOWERING PEAK OF MOUNT VORG CAME INTO VIEW.
THIS IS WHERE I WAS SUPPOSED TO COLLIDE WITH THE EMPEROR'S CRAFT!

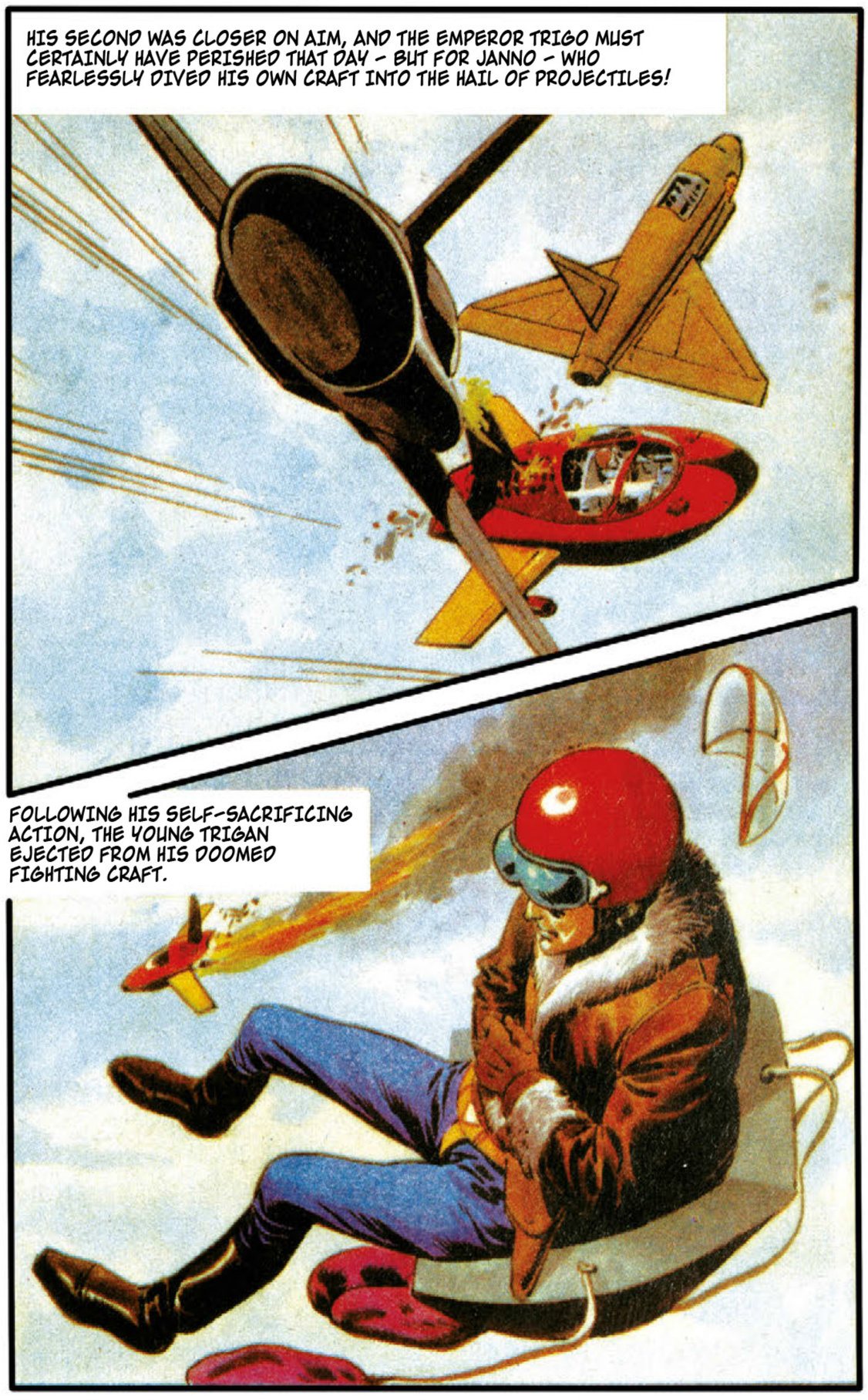

AND THEN – JANNO'S SIXTH SENSE OF A FIGHTING MAN WARNED HIM OF DANGER!

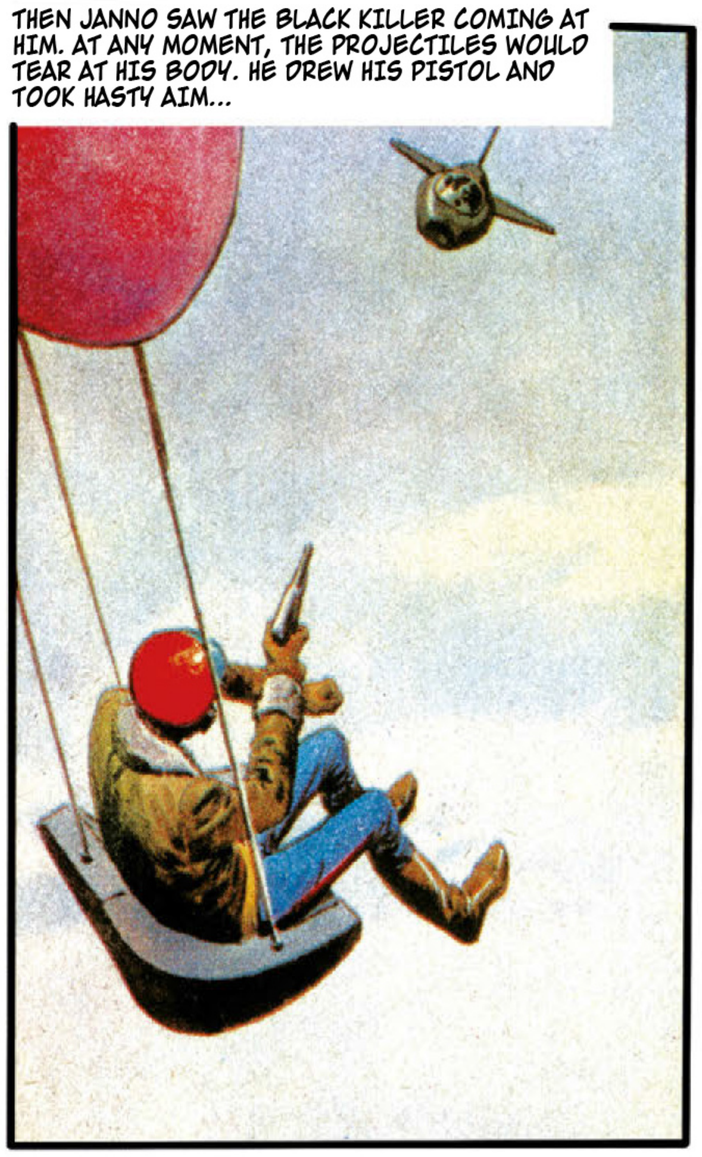
HE WRENCHED AT THE CONTROLS. A STREAK OF FLAME CUT THE AIR WHERE HE HAD BEEN AN INSTANT BEFORE – AND A DARK SHAPE FLASHED OVERHEAD!
BY THE STARS! IT ISN'T... IT CAN'T BE... DORAN!

BUT THE MAN AT THE CONTROLS OF THE OTHER CRAFT WAS INDEED DORAN!
IT IS FORTUNATE THAT I AM ALWAYS AT HAND IN CASE OF FAILURE! NOW I WILL PERFORM THE FINAL DISASTER MYSELF – THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EMPEROR!

HE DIVED STRAIGHT FOR THE IMPERIAL CRAFT!


DORAN'S FIRST BURST OF FIRE PLAYED ALL ROUND THE IMPERIAL CRAFT.

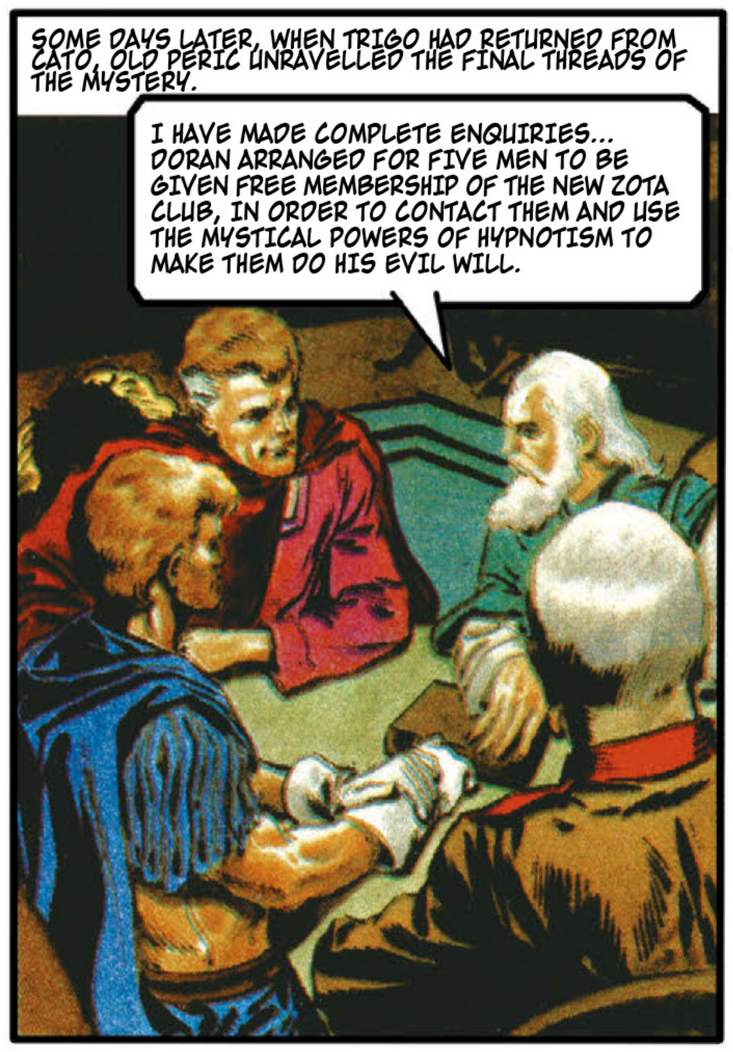

HIS SECOND WAS CLOSER ON AIM, AND THE EMPEROR TRIGO MUST CERTAINLY HAVE PERISHED THAT DAY – BUT FOR JANNO – WHO FEARLESSLY DIVED HIS OWN CRAFT INTO THE HAIL OF PROJECTILES!
FOLLOWING HIS SELF-SACRIFICING ACTION, THE YOUNG TRIGAN EJECTED FROM HIS DOOMED FIGHTING CRAFT.


THEN JANNO SAW THE BLACK KILLER COMING AT HIM. AT ANY MOMENT, THE PROJECTILES WOULD TEAR AT HIS BODY. HE DREW HIS PISTOL AND TOOK HASTY AIM...

DORAN, WHO WAS SQUINTING THROUGH HIS GUN SIGHT...
...WAS SUDDENLY BLINDED – AS HIS ARMOURED WINDSCREEN WAS GRAZED BY JANNO'S LUCKY SHOT.

STILL BLINDED BEHIND HIS OPAQUE WINDSCREEN, THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TRIGAN DISASTERS CRASHED INTO THE FROWNING PEAK OF MOUNT VORG!

AS THE IMPERIAL CRAFT CIRCLED NEAR HIM, JANNO WAVED TO HIS UNCLE. HIS SHOUT COULD NOT BE HEARD, BUT HE KNEW THAT HIS MESSAGE WAS CLEAR.
ALL'S WELL! THERE WILL BE NO MORE DISASTERS!


SOME DAYS LATER, WHEN TRIGO HAD RETURNED FROM CATO, OLD PERIC UNRAVELLED THE FINAL THREADS OF THE MYSTERY.
I HAVE MADE COMPLETE ENQUIRIES... DORAN ARRANGED FOR FIVE MEN TO BE GIVEN FREE MEMBERSHIP OF THE NEW ZOTA CLUB, IN ORDER TO CONTACT THEM AND USE THE MYSTICAL POWERS OF HYPNOTISM TO MAKE THEM DO HIS EVIL WILL.

TRIGO BURST IN WITH A QUESTION.
BUT WHY?... WHY?... DORAN BORE AN HONOURED NAME!
HIS DIARY HAS BEEN FOUND, AND IT EXPLAINS ALL. HE WAS OBSESSED WITH THE IDEA THAT HIS FATHER WAS CARELESSLY SENT TO HIS DEATH BY THE TRIGAN HIGH COMMAND.

ALL PRESENT RECALLED – IN THEIR MINDS' EYES – THE SAGA OF DORAN'S FATHER, A COLONEL OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD, WHO WAS WIPED OUT WITH HIS COMMAND DURING THE LOKAN WARS.

SO – DORAN PLANNED THE DISASTERS AGAINST THE TRIGAN EMPIRE TO AVENGE HIS FATHER'S DEATH!
YES! BUT HE WAS MISGUIDED. IT WAS HIS FATHER'S OWN GLORY-SEEKING FOLLY THAT LED HIM INTO THE LOKAN TRAP. HE DIED AN UNNECESSARY HERO!

TRIGO THEN PLACED A DECORATION ABOUT HIS NEPHEW'S NECK.
JANNO! FOR SAVING THE LIFE OF YOUR EMPEROR – THE HIGHEST ORDER THAT THE TRIGAN EMPIRE CAN BESTOW!

XXXIV

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

THE WISH FULFILLER

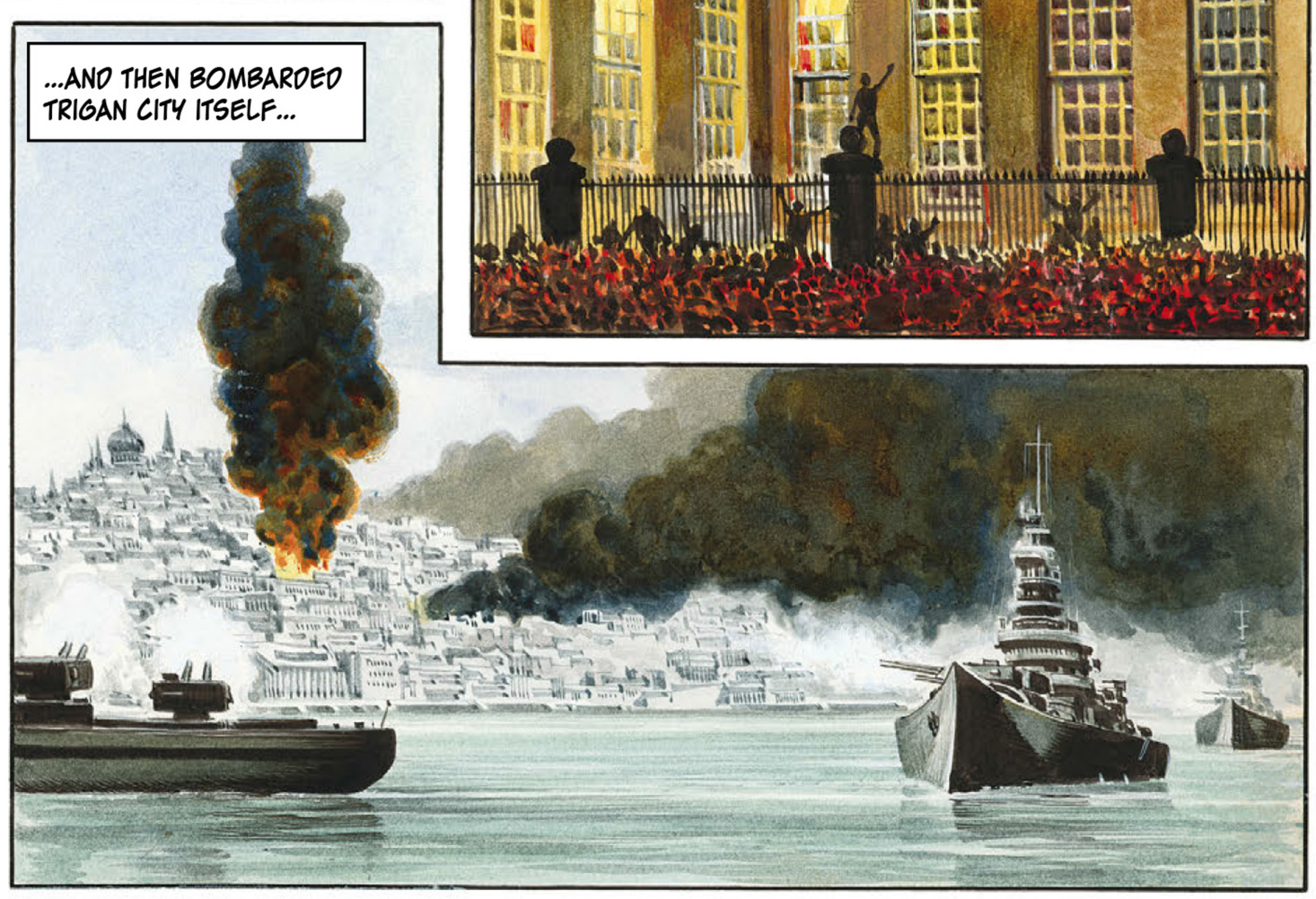
Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 541-549

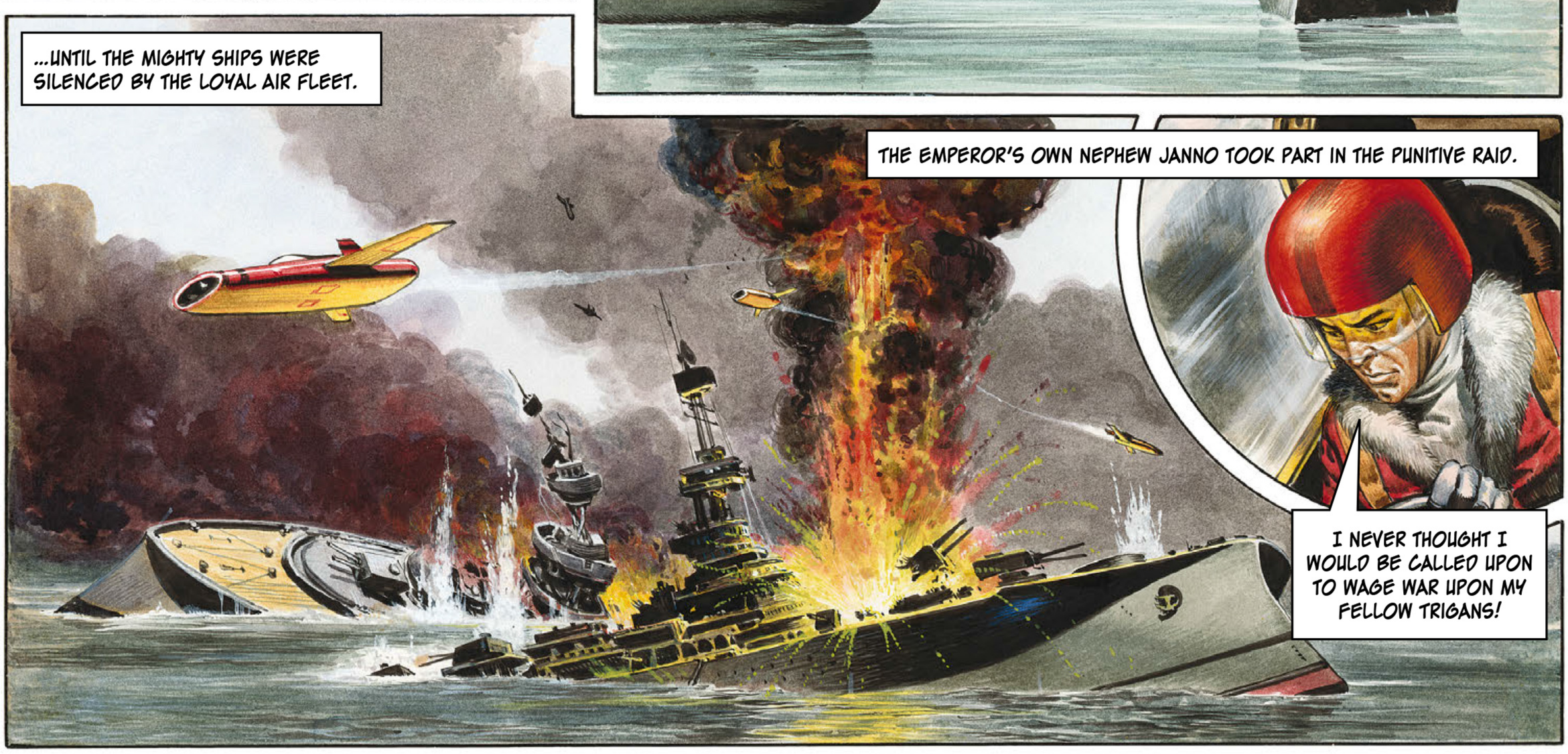
27th May 1972 – 22nd July 1972

THE SECOND YEAR OF VANNI WENT DOWN IN THE ANNALS OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE AS THE YEAR OF REVOLUTIONS. IT BEGAN WITH A TERRIBLE RAID IN THE CITY.
GIVE US FOOD!
DOWN WITH THE TYRANT!

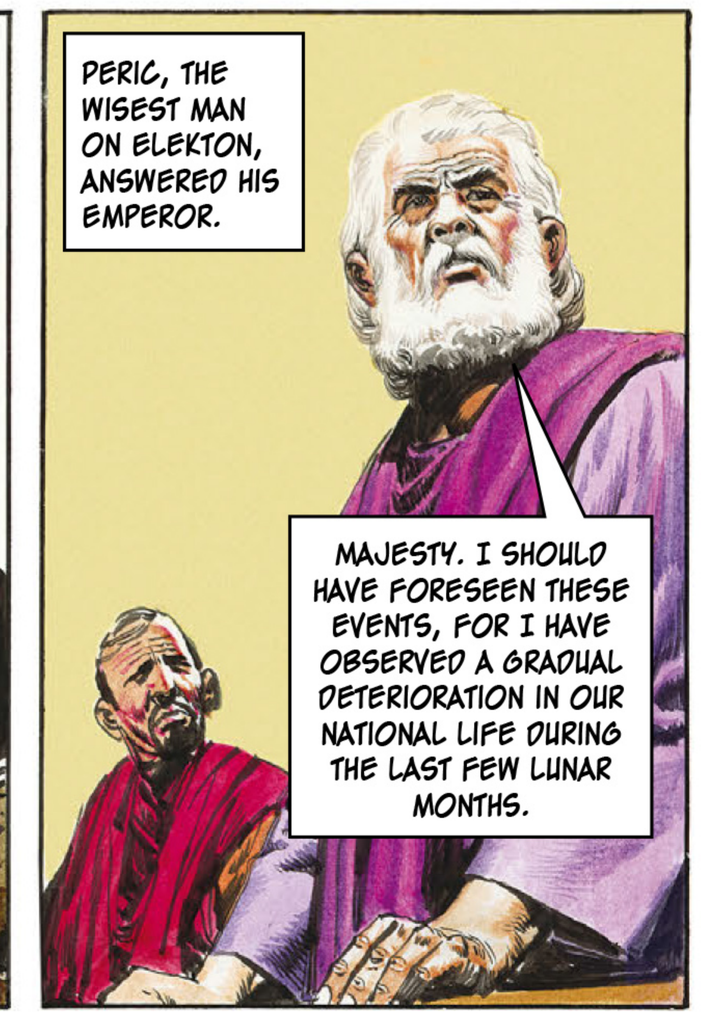
THE IMPERIAL PALACE WAS BURNT TO THE GROUND BY THE MOB AND TRIGO AND HIS FAMILY BARELY ESCAPED WITH THEIR LIVES!

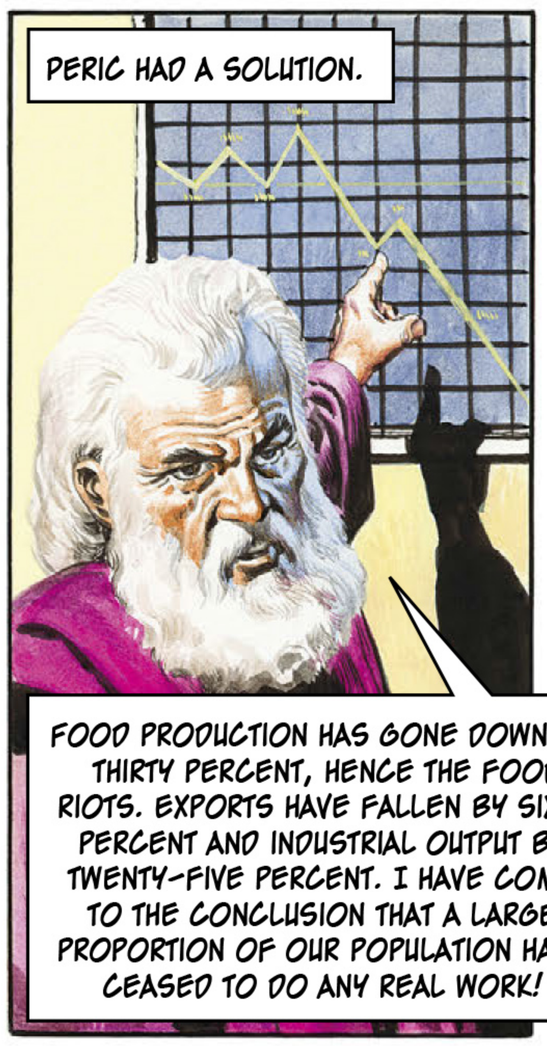
SHORTLY AFTER CAME THE GREAT NAVAL MUTINY. THE MEN OF THE GREAT OCEAN FLEET ELIMINATED THEIR OFFICERS...

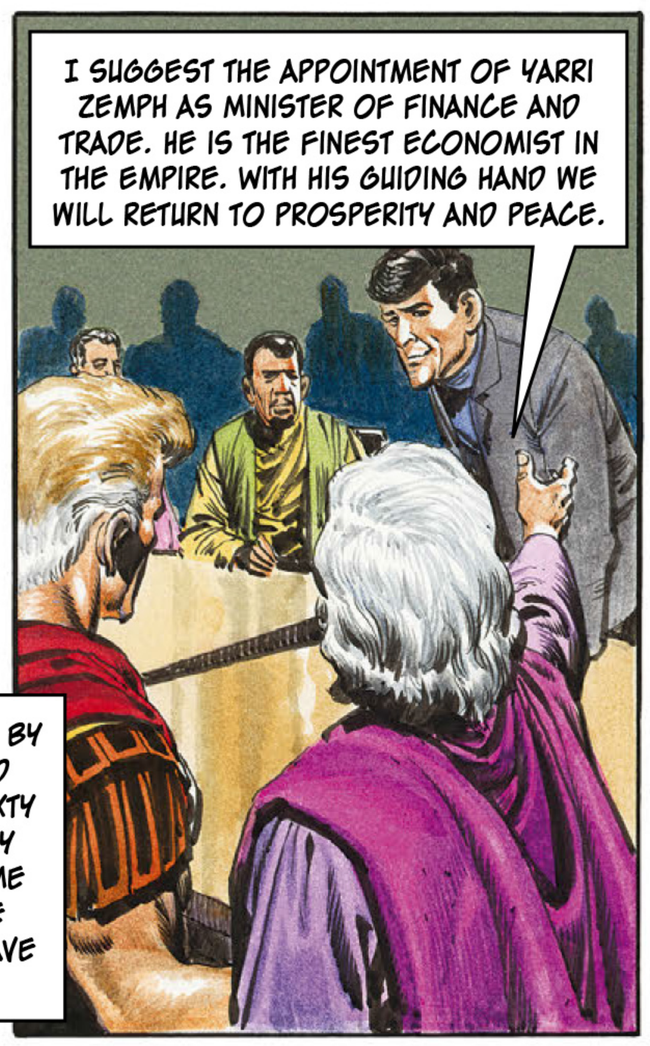

...AND THEN BOMBARDED TRIGAN CITY ITSELF...

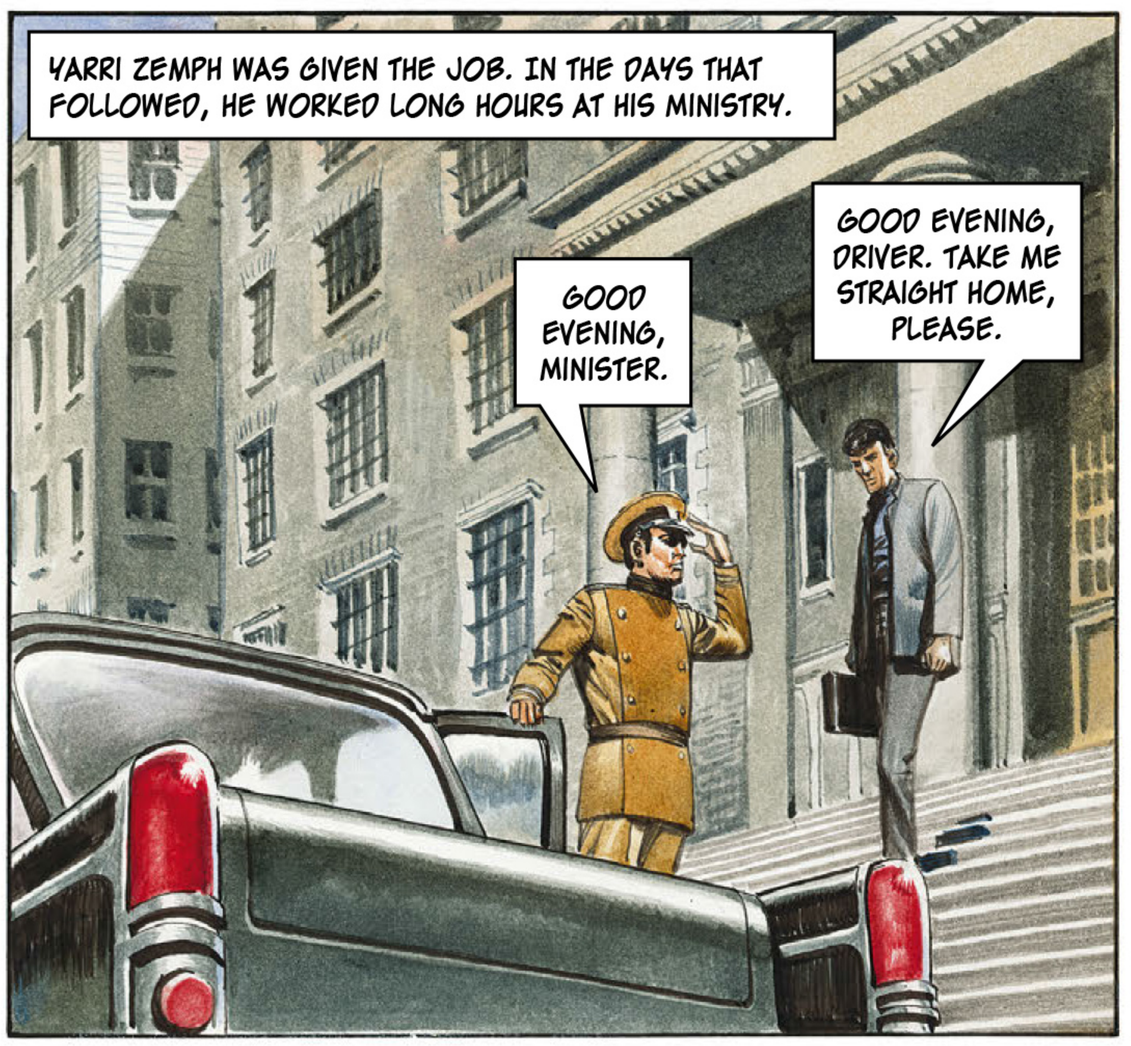

...UNTIL THE MIGHTY SHIPS WERE SILENCED BY THE LOYAL AIR FLEET.
THE EMPEROR'S OWN NEPHEW JANNO TOOK PART IN THE PUNITIVE RAID.
I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD BE CALLED UPON TO WAGE WAR UPON MY FELLOW TRIGANS!

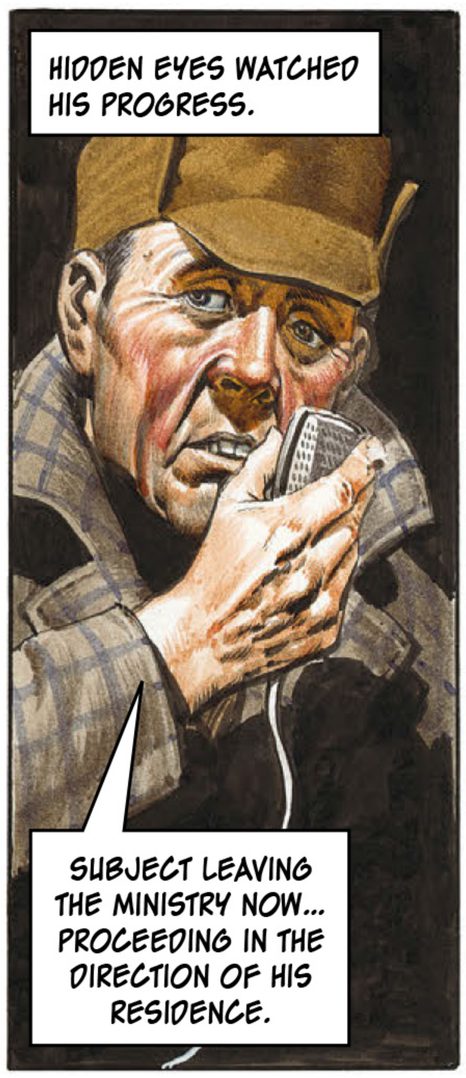
WHILE THE FIGHTING STILL RAGED, THE EMPEROR CALLED AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL.
GENTLEMEN. THE EMPIRE IS FALLING APART! WHY? WHY? WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO CAUSE THIS? WHAT IS WRONG WITH US?

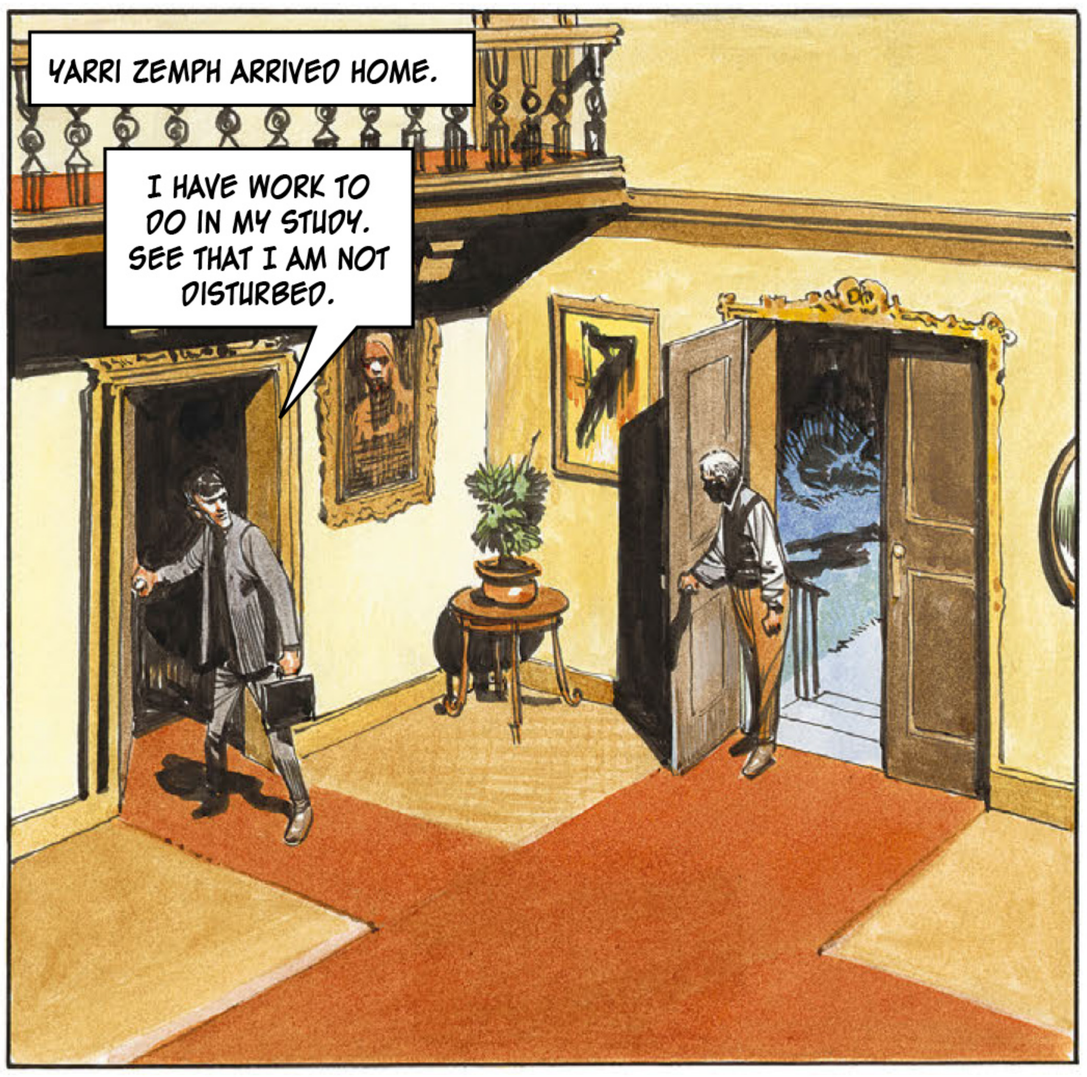

PERIC, THE WISEST MAN ON ELEKTON, ANSWERED HIS EMPEROR.
MAJESTY. I SHOULD HAVE FORESEEN THESE EVENTS, FOR I HAVE OBSERVED A GRADUAL DETERIORATION IN OUR NATIONAL LIFE DURING THE LAST FEW LUNAR MONTHS.


PERIC HAD A SOLUTION.
FOOD PRODUCTION HAS GONE DOWN BY THIRTY PERCENT, HENCE THE FOOD RIOTS. EXPORTS HAVE FALLEN BY SIXTY PERCENT AND INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT BY TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT. I HAVE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT A LARGE PROPORTION OF OUR POPULATION HAVE CEASED TO DO ANY REAL WORK!


I SUGGEST THE APPOINTMENT OF YARRI ZEMPH AS MINISTER OF FINANCE AND TRADE. HE IS THE FINEST ECONOMIST IN THE EMPIRE. WITH HIS GUIDING HAND WE WILL RETURN TO PROSPERITY AND PEACE.


YARRI ZEMPH WAS GIVEN THE JOB. IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, HE WORKED LONG HOURS AT HIS MINISTRY.
GOOD EVENING, MINISTER.
GOOD EVENING, DRIVER. TAKE ME STRAIGHT HOME, PLEASE.


HIDDEN EYES WATCHED HIS PROGRESS.
SUBJECT LEAVING THE MINISTRY NOW... PROCEEDING IN THE DIRECTION OF HIS RESIDENCE.


YARRI ZEMPH ARRIVED HOME.
I HAVE WORK TO DO IN MY STUDY. SEE THAT I AM NOT DISTURBED.

AND THERE...IT HAPPENED!
UUUUUGH!

NIGHT TIME IN TRIGAN CITY, AND A GANG OF HUNGRY TROUBLEMAKERS ARE WAITING FOR A VICTIM...

HERE'S OUR CHANCE. SPREAD OUT AND STOP THIS FELLOW!

JANNO AND HIS FATHER, BRAG, HAD BEEN URGENTLY SUMMONED TO THE EMPEROR. THEY SAW THE MENACING FIGURES AHEAD.

IT'S ONE OF THE MARAUDING GANGS. WE'RE FOR IT NOW!

THEY WERE DRAGGED FROM THEIR VEHICLE.

WE'RE IN LUCK! THEY'RE A COUPLE OF HIGH-UPS!

DON'T YOU RECOGNISE 'EM? THE EMPEROR'S BROTHER AND HIS BRAT!

DON LAWRENCE

JANNO DROVE HIS FIST FORWARD.

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE, FATHER!

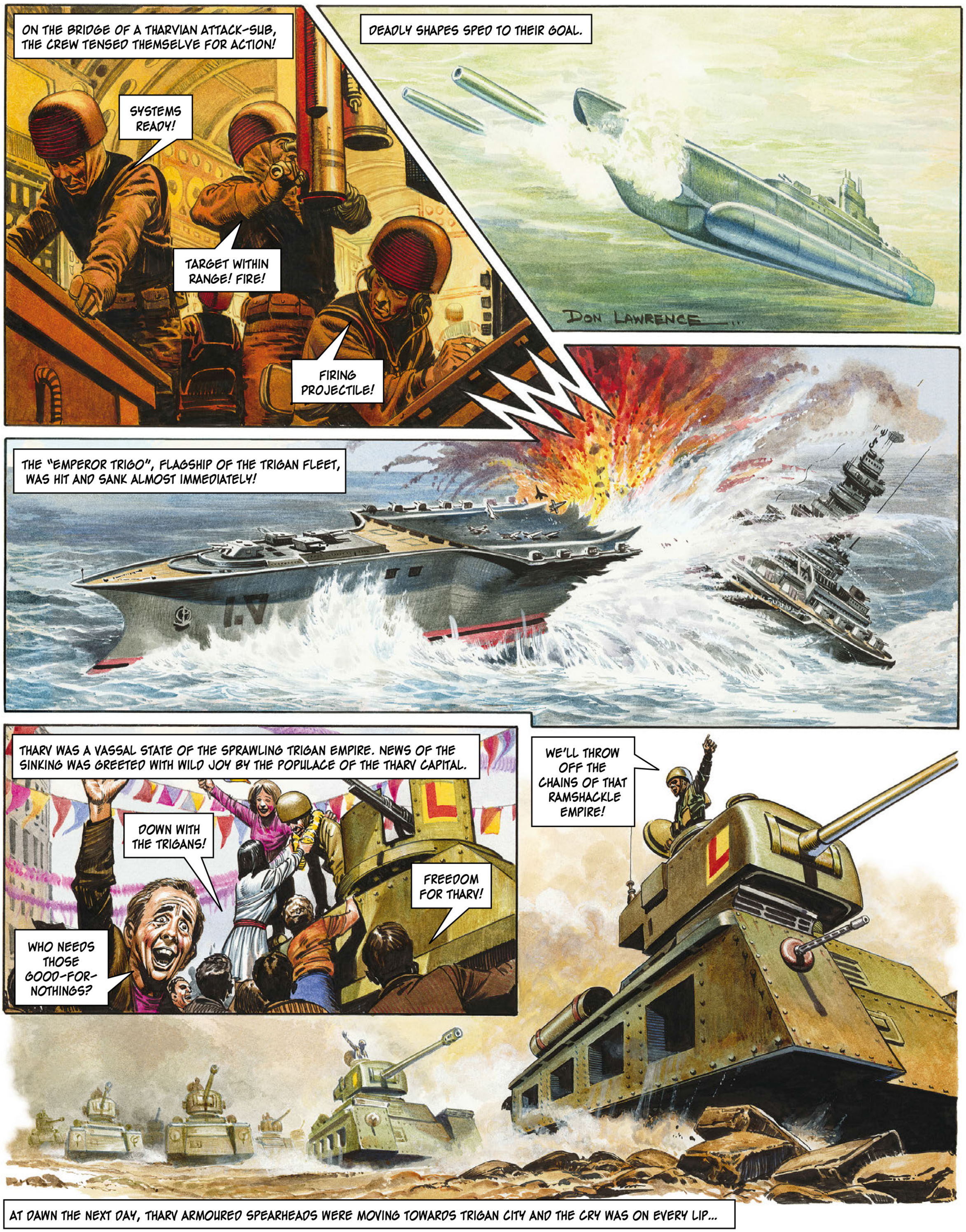
I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU, JANNO!

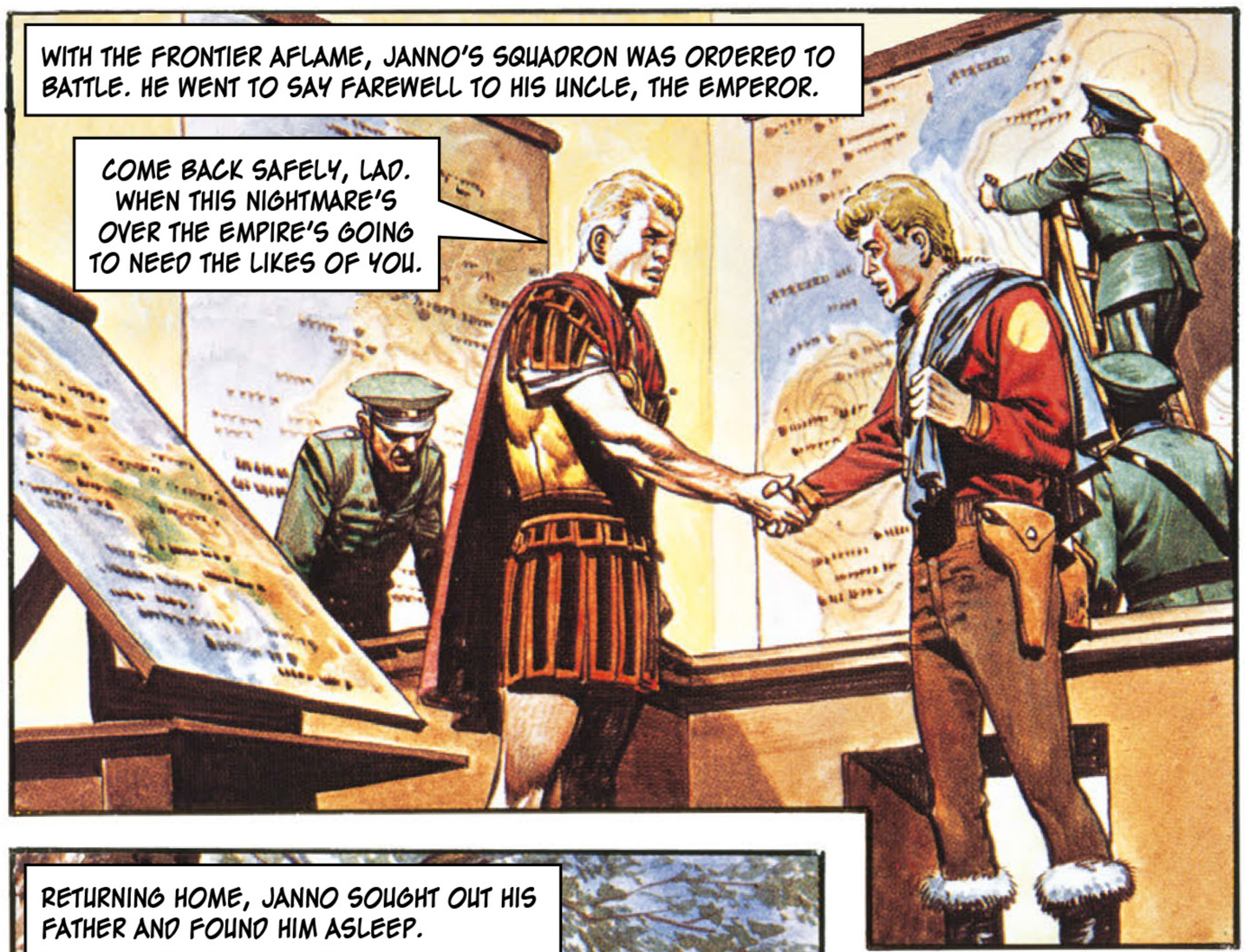
FATHER AND SON RACED TO THE PARAPET OF THE HIGH BRIDGE...

STOP 'EM! DON'T LET 'EM GET AWAY!

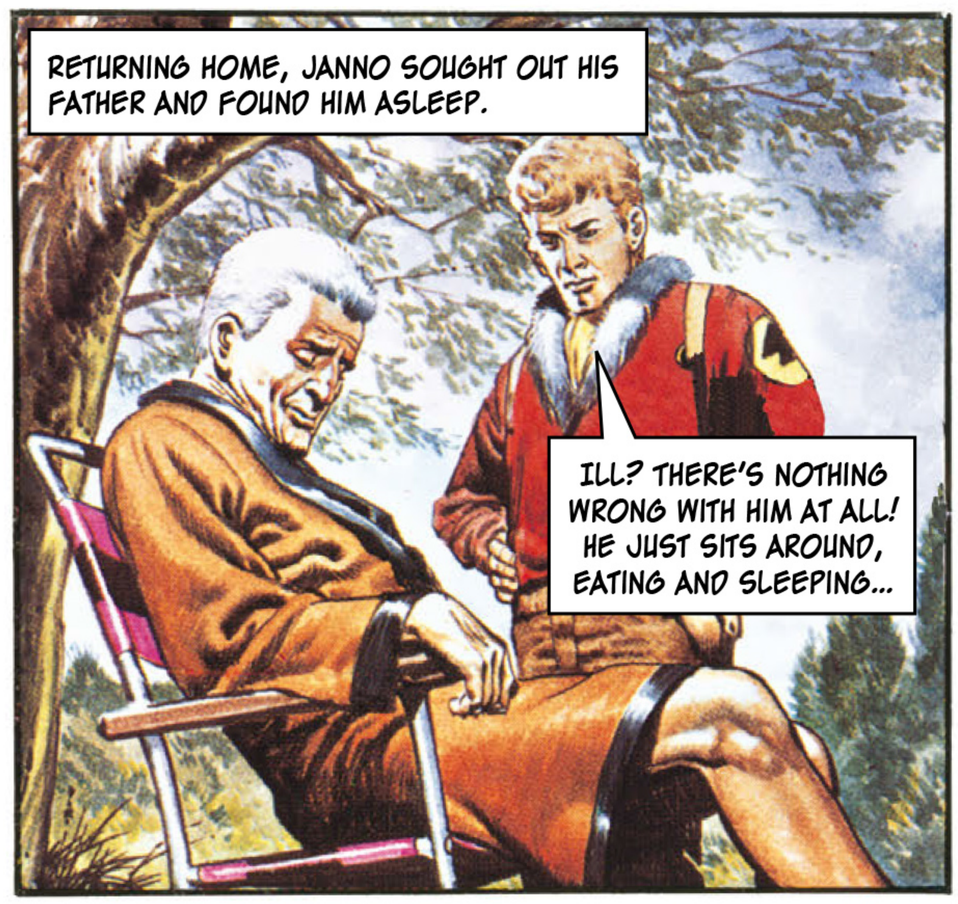
...AND LEAPT!

SOME TIME LATER, SOAKED TO THE SKIN FROM THEIR IMMERSION IN THE RIVER, THEY ARRIVED AT THE WAR MINISTRY – TO FIND THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL IN NOISY SESSION!
AH! YOU'RE HERE AT LAST. THINGS ARE GOING FROM BAD TO WORSE. WE'RE TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO PREVENT ALL-OUT REVOLUTION!
I THOUGHT YARRI ZEMPH WAS SUPPOSED TO BE DOING THAT!
YARRI ZEMPH HAS NOT BEEN AT HIS OFFICE FOR DAYS... BUT HE IS ON HIS WAY HERE NOW.
AND THEN, YARRI ZEMPH CAME IN!
HELLO, ALL! MY, WHAT A MISERABLE LOOKING LOT YOU ARE. NOT A SMILE AMONGST YOU!
BY ALL THE DEMONS OF DAVELI...!
GONE WAS THE NEAT, PRECISE CIVIL SERVANT. YARRI ZEMPH WAS MUCH CHANGED.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO SAVE THE EMPIRE FOR POSTERITY?
WHO CARES ABOUT THE EMPIRE? AS FOR POSTERITY– WHAT DID POSTERITY EVER DO FOR ME?
THE SESSION ENDED IN TURMOIL AND THE ARREST OF YARRI ZEMPH.
HEY! TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF ME!
THE EMPEROR SHOULD ABDICATE!
DECLARE A REPUBLIC? NEVER!
WHAT'S TO BE DONE NOW?
IT WAS NEARLY DAWN WHEN JANNO AND HIS FATHER WERE ESCORTED HOME IN AN ARMY FIGHTING MACHINE.
WHAT A NIGHT! YOU LOOK TIRED AND FED-UP, FATHER.
I AM, LAD. NOTHING WOULD PLEASE ME MORE THAN TO RETIRE AND GO AND FARM OUR ESTATES IN THE COUNTRY.
SOMEONE WAS WAITING FOR BRAG IN THE SHADOWS OF HIS ROOM!
GET SOME SLEEP, FATHER... YOU'LL FEEL BETTER.
I SUPPOSE SO. SEE YOU LATER.


ON THE BRIDGE OF A THARVIAN ATTACK-SUB, THE CREW TENSED THEMSELVE FOR ACTION!
SYSTEMS READY!
TARGET WITHIN RANGE! FIRE!
FIRING PROJECTILE!
DEADLY SHAPES SPED TO THEIR GOAL.
DON LAWRENCE
THE "EMPEROR TRIGO", FLAGSHIP OF THE TRIGAN FLEET, WAS HIT AND SANK ALMOST IMMEDIATELY!
THARV WAS A VASSAL STATE OF THE SPRAWLING TRIGAN EMPIRE. NEWS OF THE SINKING WAS GREETED WITH WILD JOY BY THE POPULACE OF THE THARV CAPITAL.
DOWN WITH THE TRIGANS!
FREEDOM FOR THARV!
WHO NEEDS THOSE GOOD-FOR-NOTHINGS?
WE'LL THROW OFF THE CHAINS OF THAT RAMSHACKLE EMPIRE!
AT DAWN THE NEXT DAY, THARV ARMOURED SPEARHEADS WERE MOVING TOWARDS TRIGAN CITY AND THE CRY WAS ON EVERY LIP...


WITH THE FRONTIER AFLAME, JANNO'S SQUADRON WAS ORDERED TO BATTLE. HE WENT TO SAY FAREWELL TO HIS UNCLE, THE EMPEROR.
COME BACK SAFELY, LAD. WHEN THIS NIGHTMARE'S OVER THE EMPIRE'S GOING TO NEED THE LIKES OF YOU.

BY THE WAY, HOW IS YOUR FATHER? I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM SINCE THE NIGHT OF THAT DISASTROUS COUNCIL MEETING. THEY SAY HE'S BEEN ILL.
YES, HE'S NOT WELL, UNCLE.

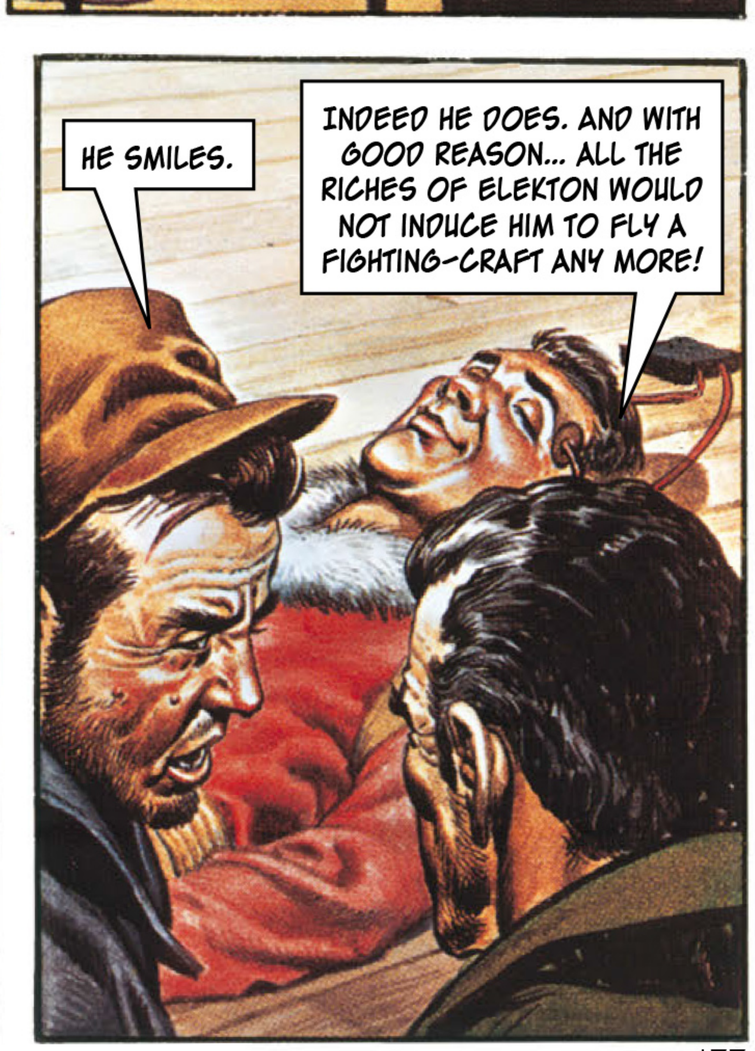

RETURNING HOME, JANNO SOUGHT OUT HIS FATHER AND FOUND HIM ASLEEP.
ILL? THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH HIM AT ALL! HE JUST SITS AROUND, EATING AND SLEEPING...

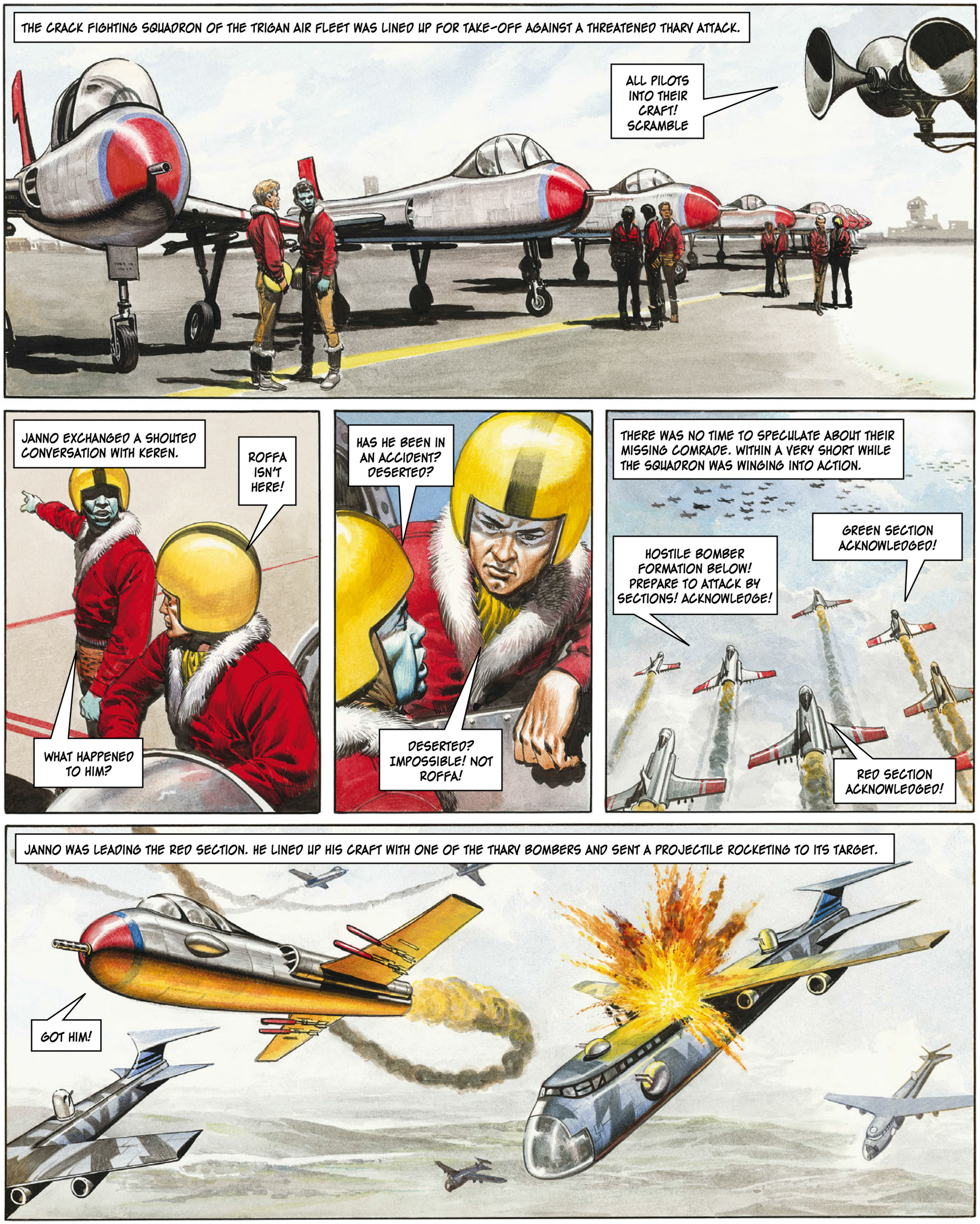
HE'S CAUGHT THE MALADY THAT'S DESTROYING THE EMPIRE... HE JUST WANTS TO DO NOTHING ALL DAY.

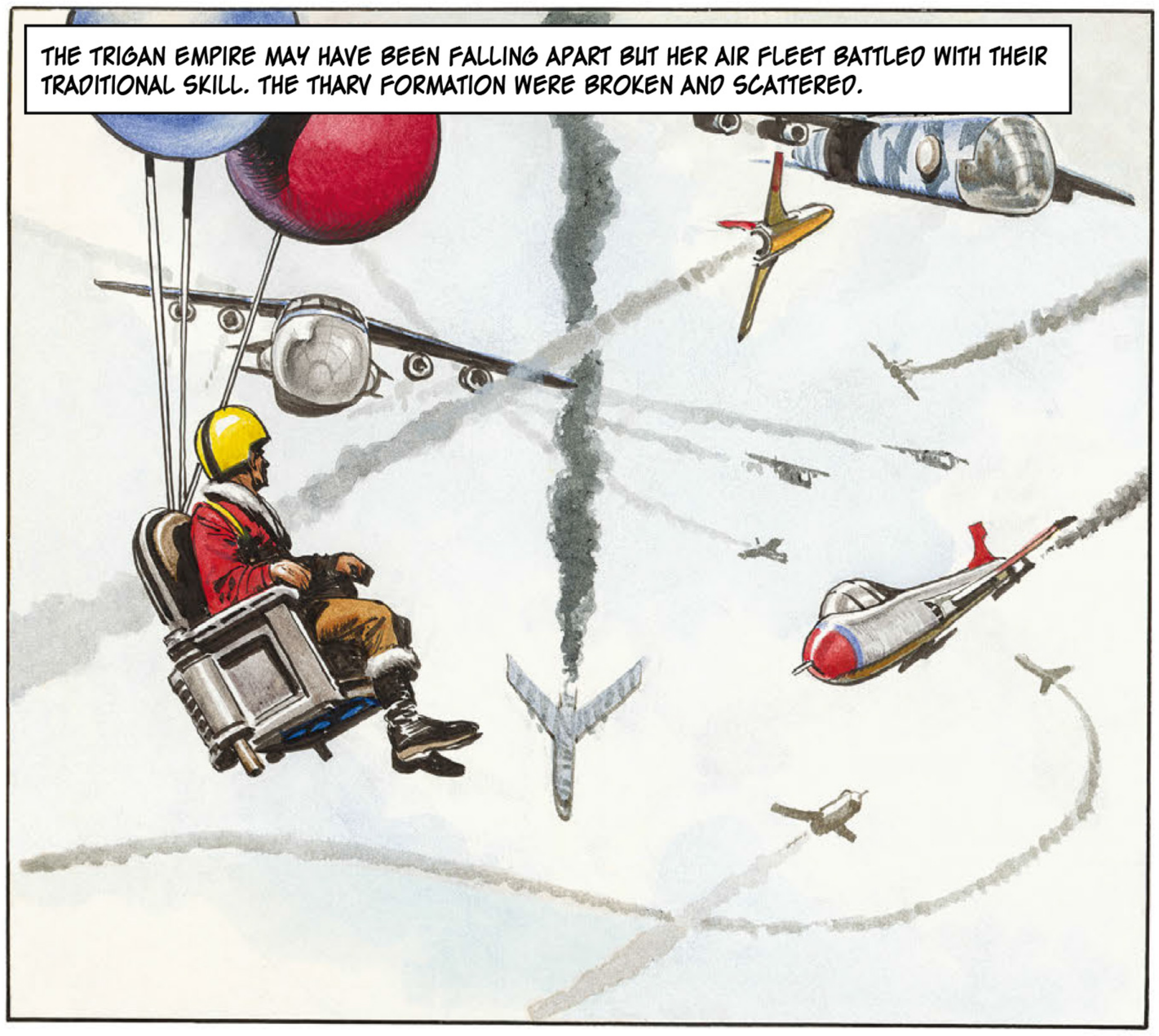
AT THAT MOMENT, JANNO'S SQUADRON-MATE ROFFA WAS PREPARING TO LEAVE. THERE CAME A KNOCK ON HIS DOOR.
WHO CAN THAT BE?

ROFFA'S WORLD DISSOLVED IN A SEA OF SUDDEN PAIN!
UUUUUGH...!

AS HE LAY THERE, ELECTRODES WERE CONNECTED TO THE HEAD OF THE AIR FLEET PILOT.


HE SMILES.
INDEED HE DOES. AND WITH GOOD REASON... ALL THE RICHES OF ELEKTON WOULD NOT INDUCE HIM TO FLY A FIGHTING-CRAFT ANY MORE!


THE CRACK FIGHTING SQUADRON OF THE TRIGAN AIR FLEET WAS LINED UP FOR TAKE-OFF AGAINST A THREATENED THARV ATTACK.
ALL PILOTS INTO THEIR CRAFT! SCRAMBLE
JANNO EXCHANGED A SHOUTED CONVERSATION WITH KEREN.
ROFFA ISN'T HERE!
WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?
HAS HE BEEN IN AN ACCIDENT? DESERTED?
DESERTED? IMPOSSIBLE! NOT ROFFA!
THERE WAS NO TIME TO SPECULATE ABOUT THEIR MISSING COMRADE. WITHIN A VERY SHORT WHILE THE SQUADRON WAS WINGING INTO ACTION.
HOSTILE BOMBER FORMATION BELOW! PREPARE TO ATTACK BY SECTIONS! ACKNOWLEDGE!
GREEN SECTION ACKNOWLEDGED!
RED SECTION ACKNOWLEDGED!
JANNO WAS LEADING THE RED SECTION. HE LINED UP HIS CRAFT WITH ONE OF THE THARV BOMBERS AND SENT A PROJECTILE ROCKETING TO ITS TARGET.
GOT HIM!

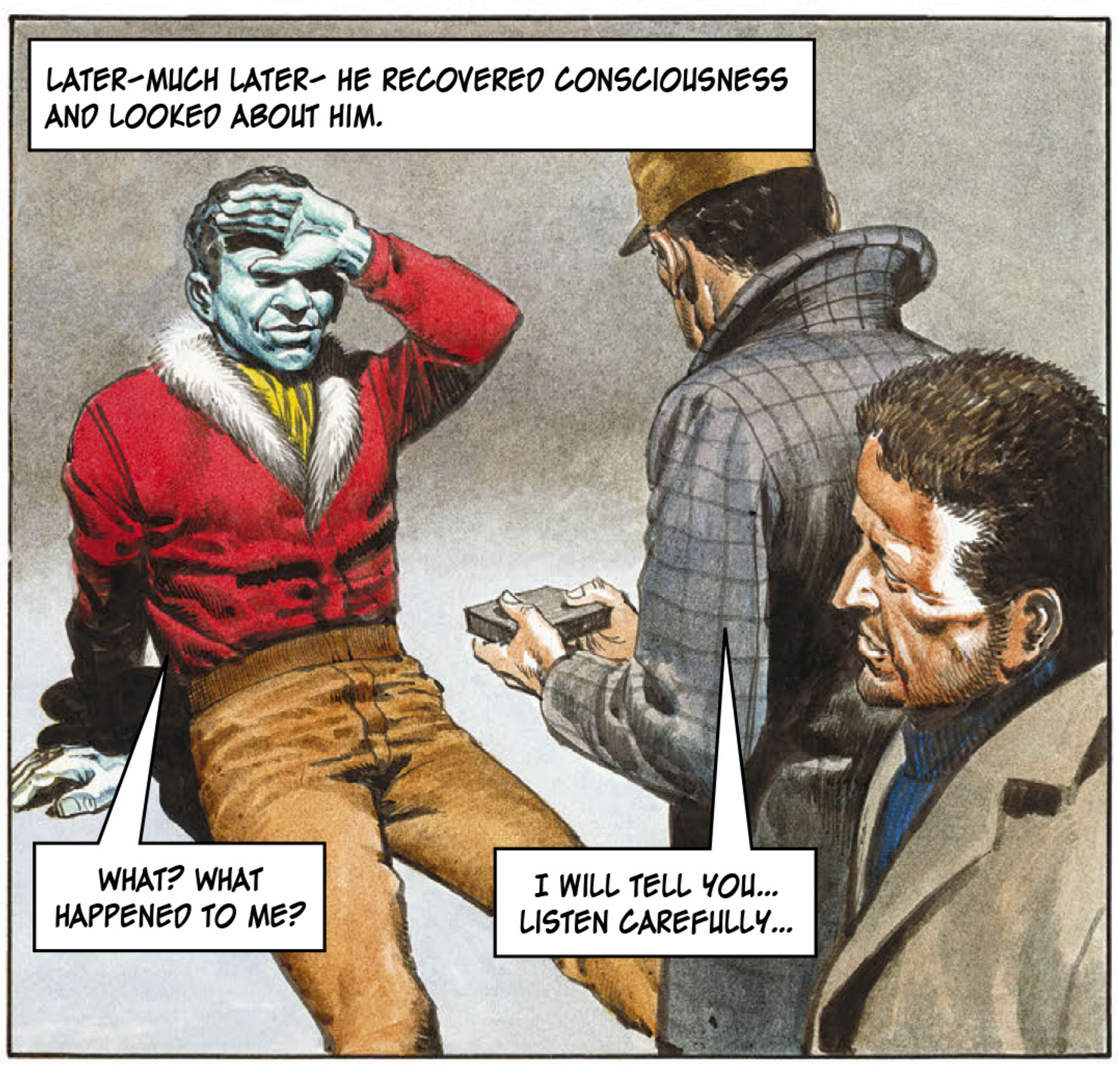

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE MAY HAVE BEEN FALLING APART BUT HER AIR FLEET BATTLED WITH THEIR TRADITIONAL SKILL. THE THARV FORMATION WERE BROKEN AND SCATTERED.

THAT EVENING, WHEN THEY LANDED, KEREN SPOKE TO HIS FRIEND.
JANNO, I'M GOING STRAIGHT ROUND TO ROFFA'S PLACE TO SEE WHAT'S BECOME OF HIM.
GOOD. IF YOU NEED ANY HELP, JUST CALL ME.

IT WAS DARK WHEN KEREN LET HIMSELF INTO ROFFA'S VILLA.
ROFFA. IT'S ME... ARE YOU THERE?

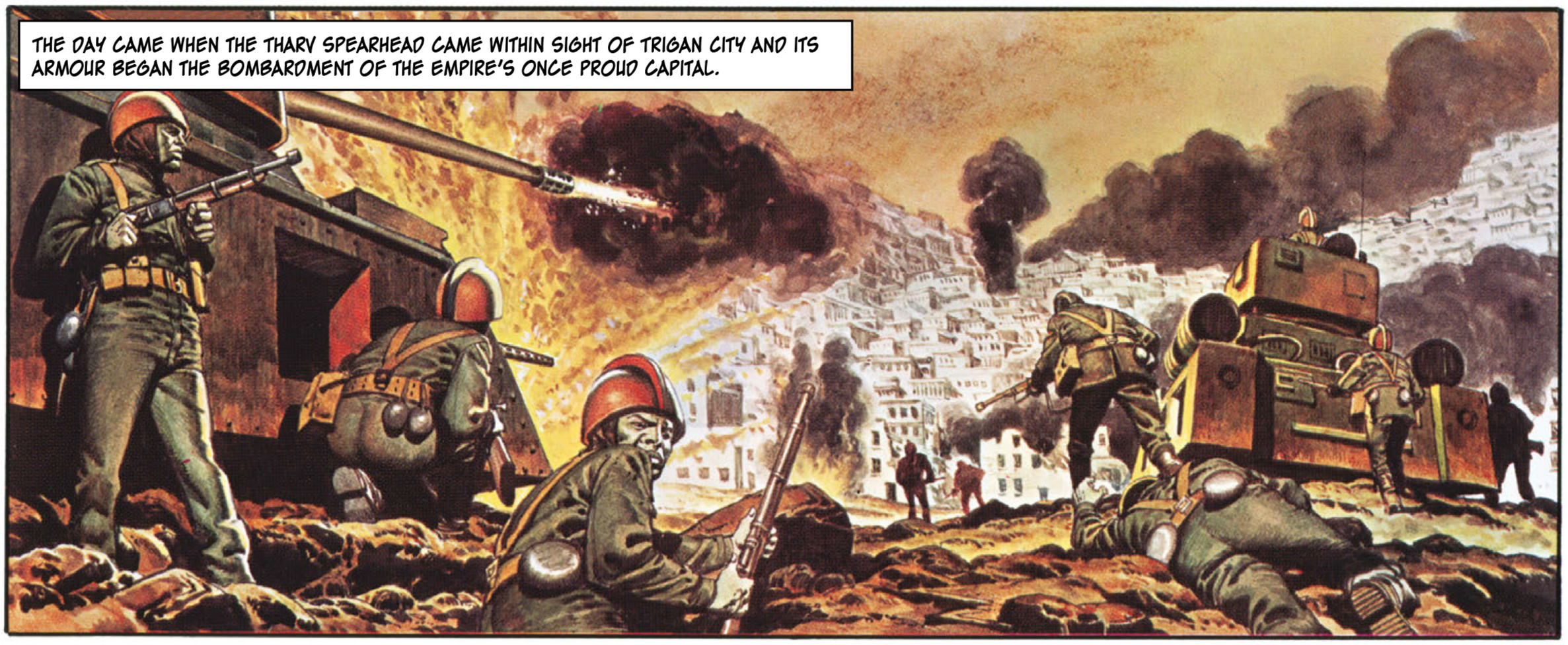
AND THEN...
AAAAAAGH...!

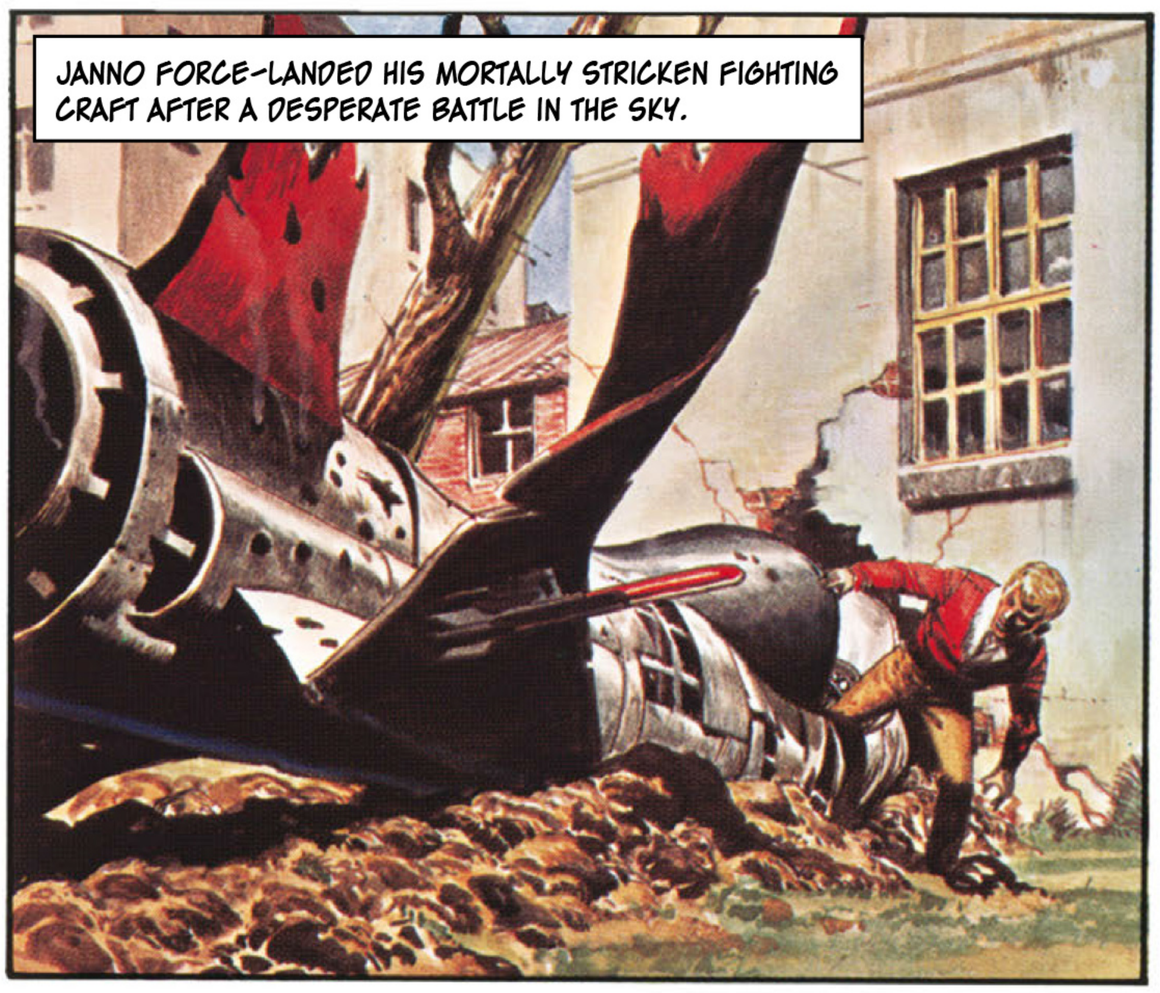
ELECTRODES WERE PLACED AGAINST HIS HEAD.


LATER-MUCH LATER- HE RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS AND LOOKED ABOUT HIM.
WHAT? WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?
I WILL TELL YOU... LISTEN CAREFULLY...

STRANGELY ENOUGH, WHEN KEREN'S ASSAILANTS LEFT THE VILLA, THEY PARTED FROM THE YOUNG PILOT ON THE BEST OF TERMS.
ARE YOU SURE THIS IS ALL YOU HAVE TO GIVE US... A THOUSAND THALLERS?
YES, MY FRIEND. IF I HAD MORE I WOULD GLADLY GIVE IT TO YOU.

WHAT NEED HAVE I FOR MONEY? WHAT NEED HAVE I FOR ANYTHING
WHEN I HAVE... THIS?


THE DAY CAME WHEN THE THARV SPEARHEAD CAME WITHIN SIGHT OF TRIGAN CITY AND ITS ARMOUR BEGAN THE BOMBARDMENT OF THE EMPIRE'S ONCE PROUD CAPITAL.


JANNO FORCE-LANDED HIS MORTALLY STRICKEN FIGHTING CRAFT AFTER A DESPERATE BATTLE IN THE SKY.

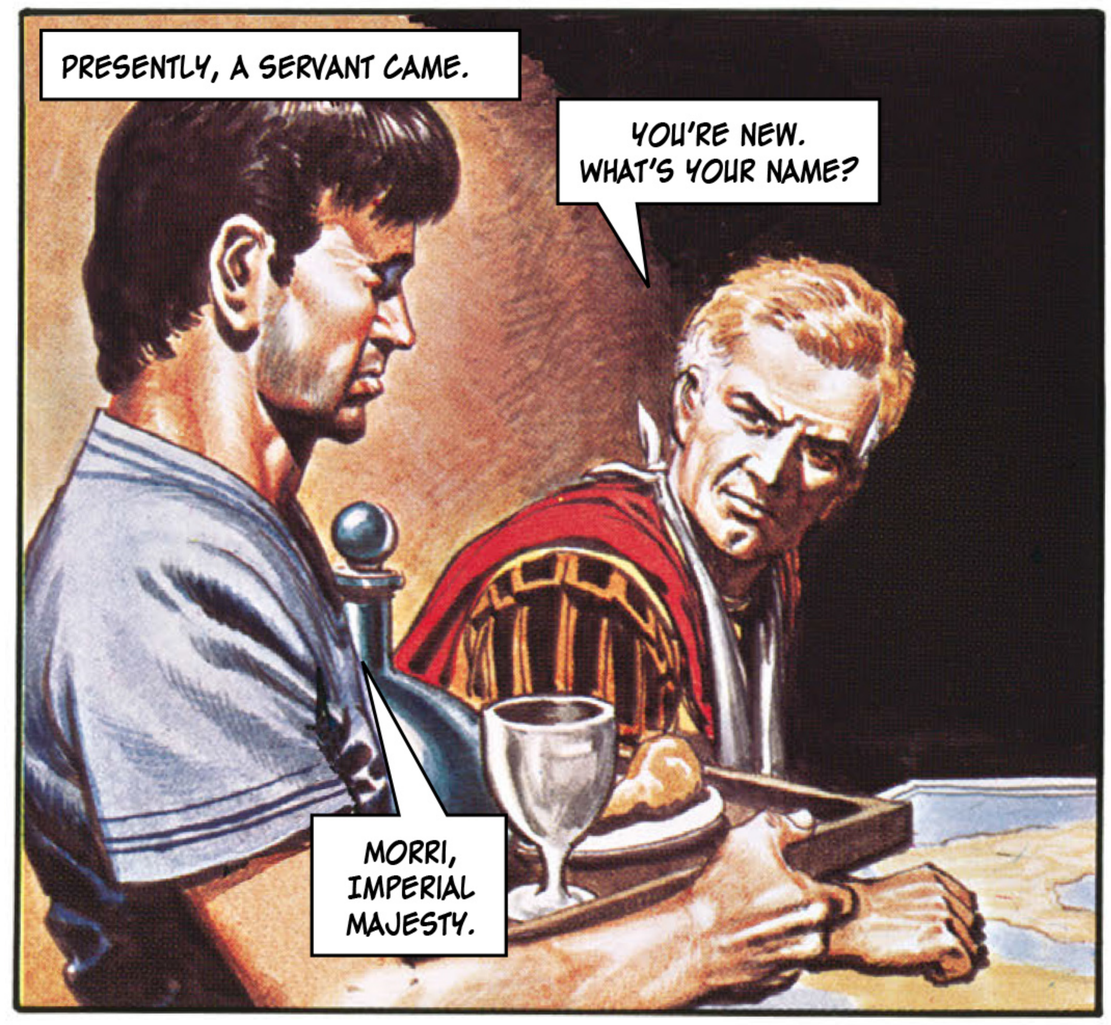
HE CAME UPON A HARD-PRESSED DEFENCE UNIT.
JOIN US, COMRADE. WE NEED EVERY MAN WHO CAN CARRY A WEAPON.
GLADLY, CAPTAIN!

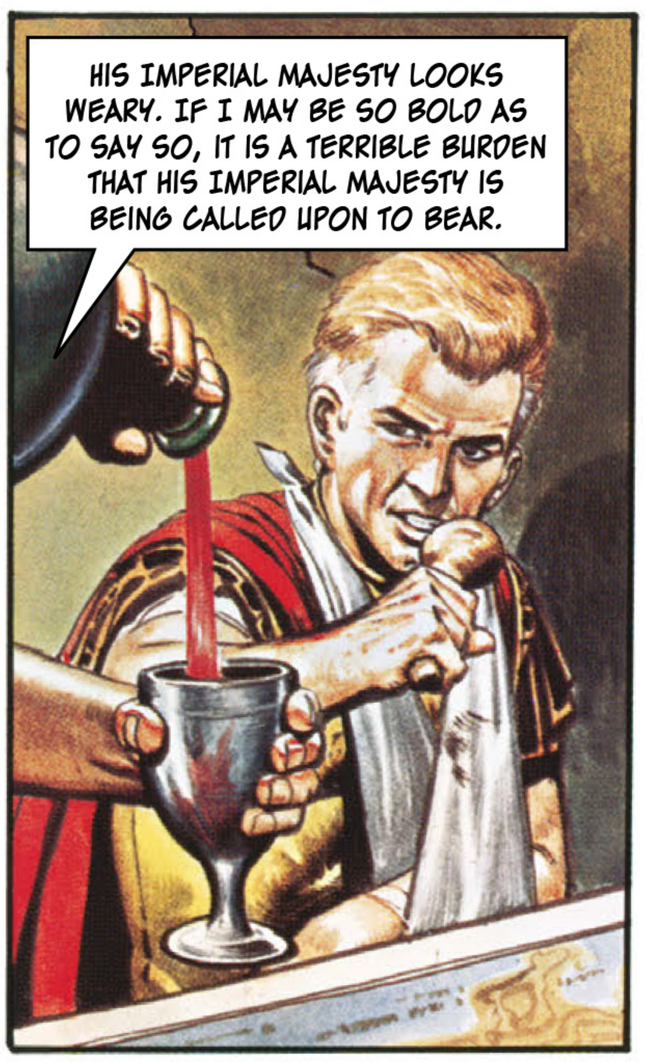
ALL THAT LONG DAY, JANNO HELPED TO BEAT OFF ASSAULT AFTER ASSAULT.

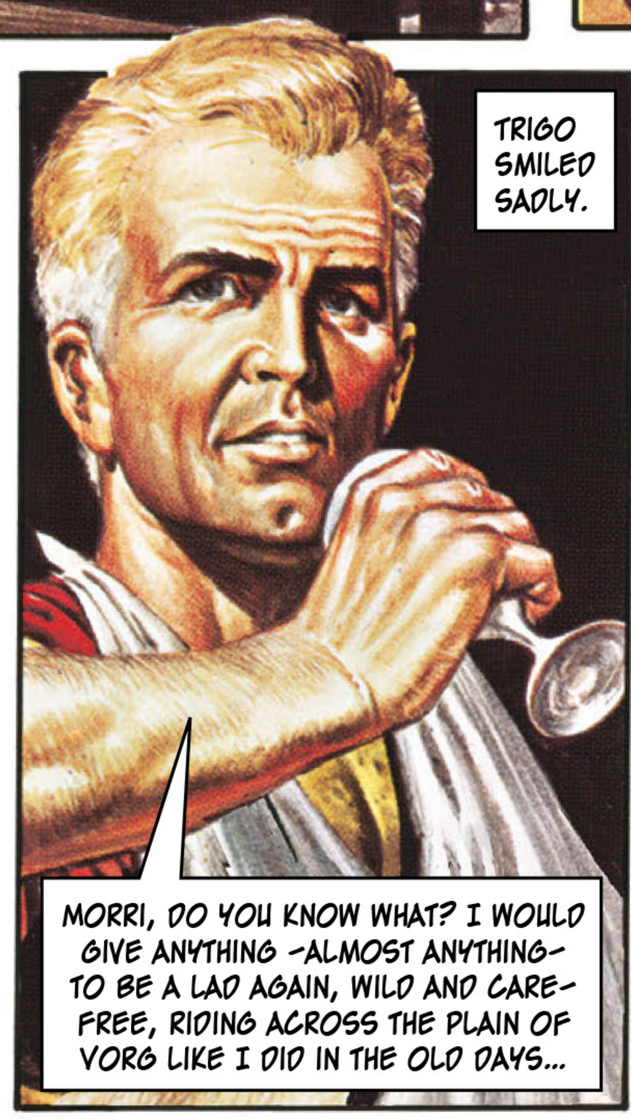
DURING THE LULLS IN THE FIGHTING, ONE THOUGHT FILLED IN HIS MIND.
WHAT HAVE THE TRIGANS COME TO? MY OWN FATHER USELESS... ROFFA AND KEREN DISAPPEARED WITHOUT TRACE, PERHAPS DESERTED...

ONLY THE EMPEROR REMAINS TO KEEP US TOGETHER! THANK THE STARS FOR THE EMPEROR! HE IS OUR INSPIRATION!

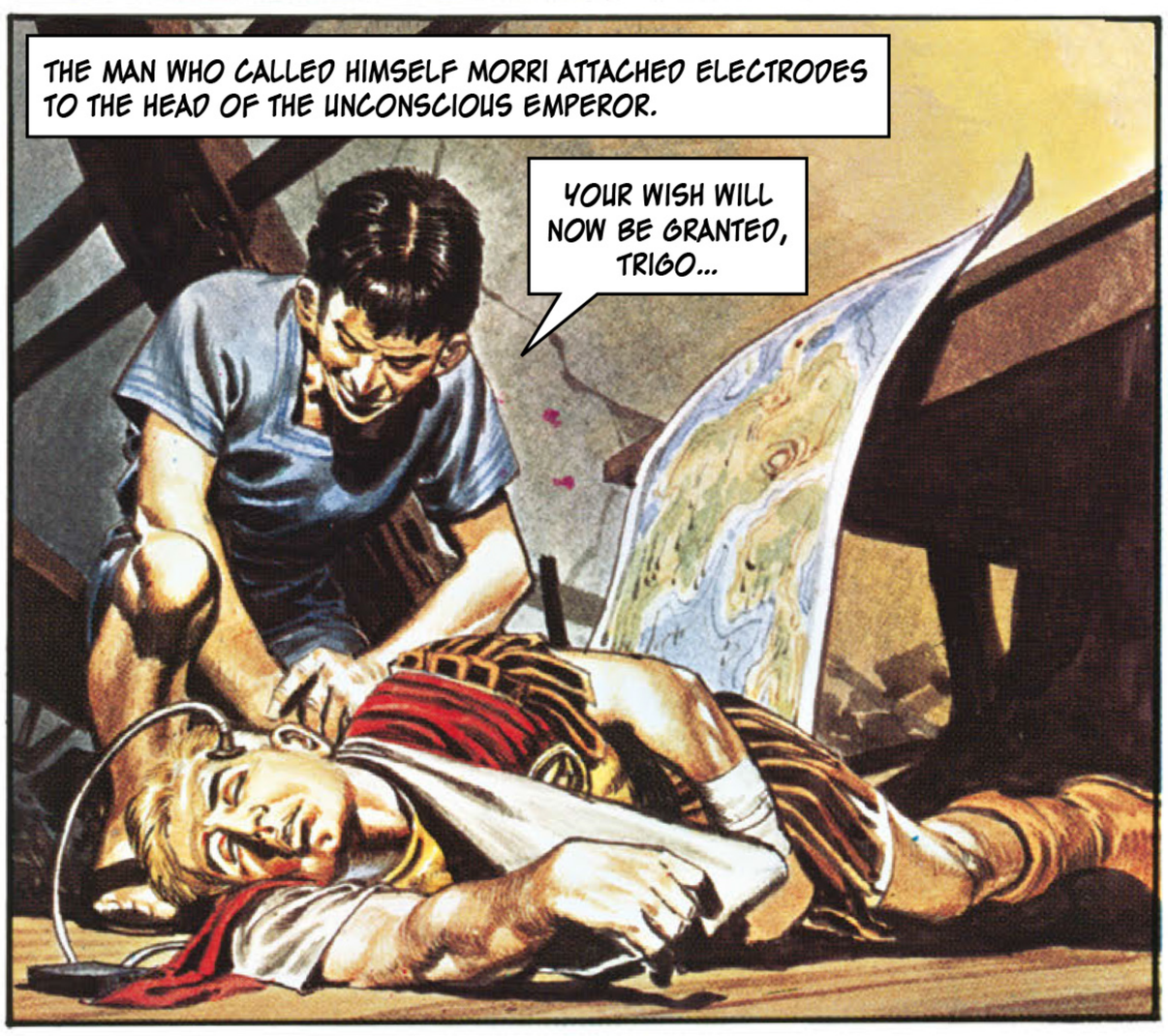
THE EMPEROR TRIGO WAS PERSONALLY DIRECTING THE DEFENCE OF THE CITY FROM HIS MAKESHIFT HEADQUARTERS IN THE SHELL-SCARRED WAR MINISTRY.
WILL THERE BE ANYTHING FURTHER TONIGHT, YOUR MAJESTY?
YES, HAVE SOMEONE BRING ME SOME MEAT AND SOMETHING TO DRINK, PLEASE.


PRESENTLY, A SERVANT CAME.
YOU'RE NEW. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
MORRI, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.


HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY LOOKS WEARY. IF I MAY BE SO BOLD AS TO SAY SO, IT IS A TERRIBLE BURDEN THAT HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY IS BEING CALLED UPON TO BEAR.


TRIGO SMILED SADLY.
MORRI, DO YOU KNOW WHAT? I WOULD GIVE ANYTHING -ALMOST ANYTHING- TO BE A LAD AGAIN, WILD AND CARE-FREE, RIDING ACROSS THE PLAIN OF VORG LIKE I DID IN THE OLD DAYS...

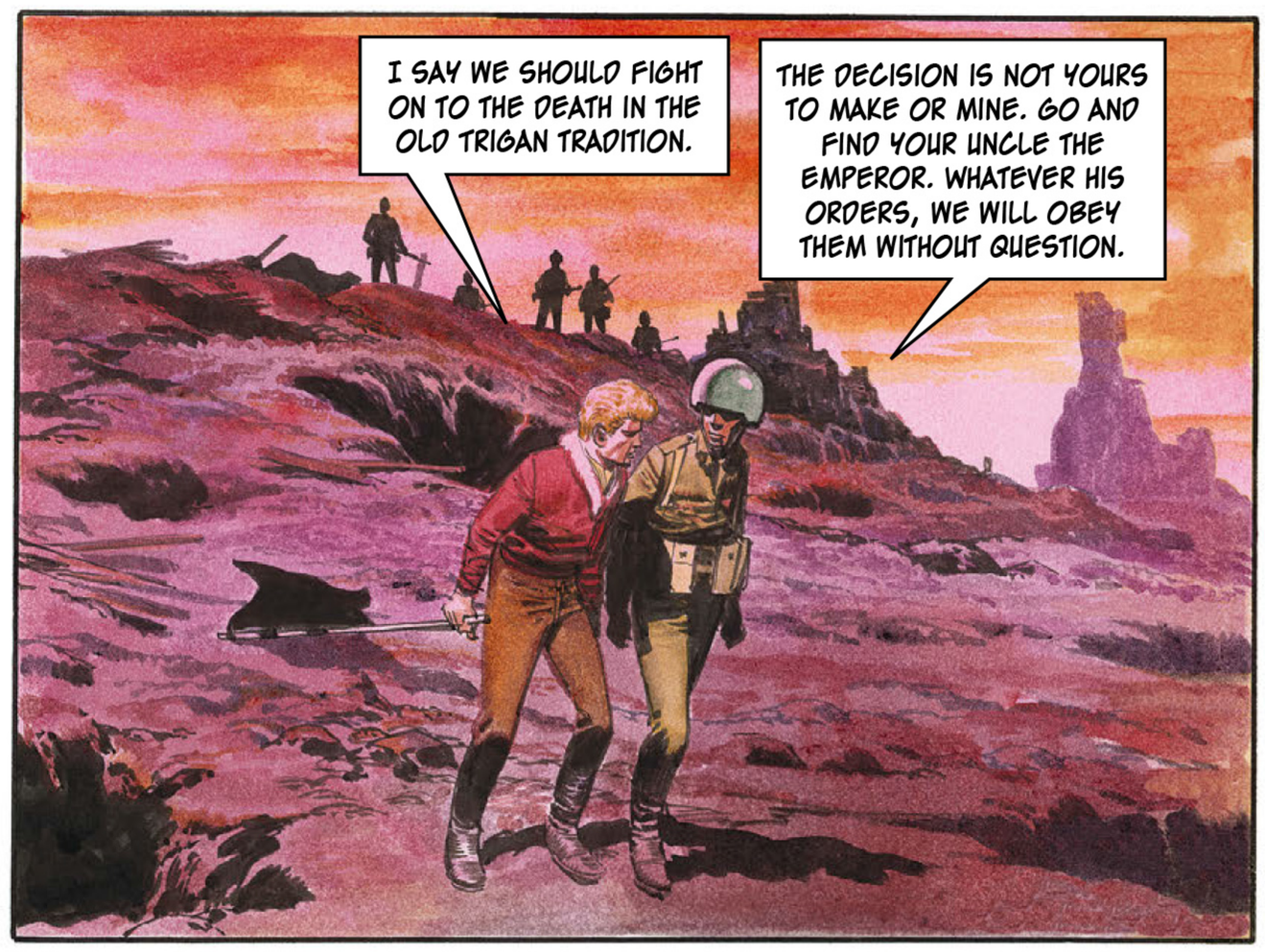
THEN HE PITCHED FORWARD-SENSELESS!
UUUUGH...

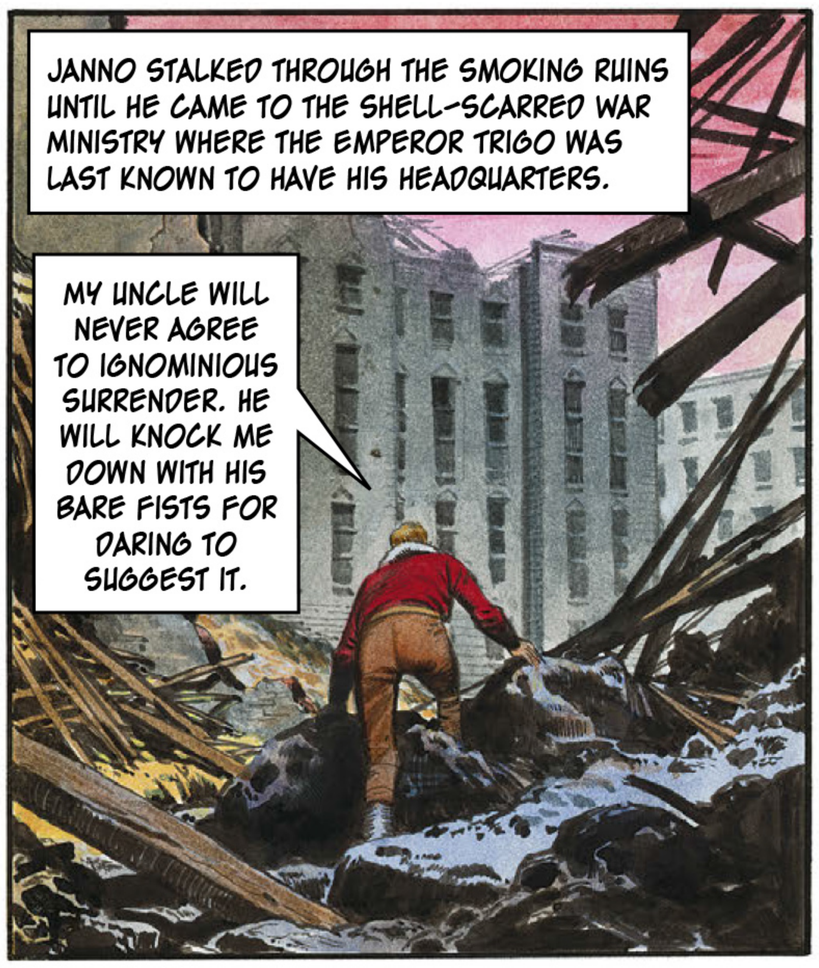

THE MAN WHO CALLED HIMSELF MORRI ATTACHED ELECTRODES TO THE HEAD OF THE UNCONSCIOUS EMPEROR.
YOUR WISH WILL NOW BE GRANTED, TRIGO...

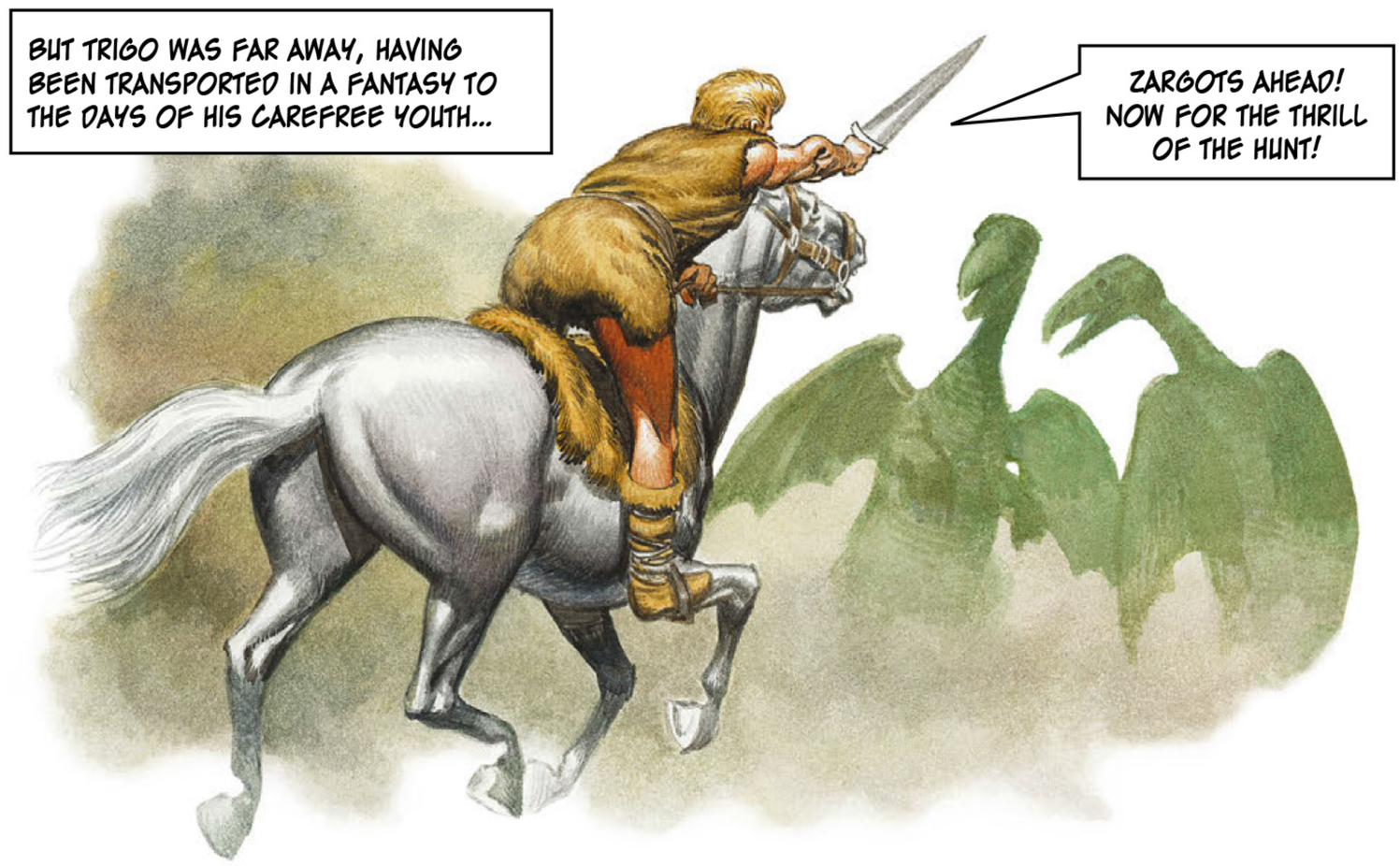
I'M FREE! FREE...!
AND THEN IT SEEMED TO TRIGO THAT HE WAS TRANSPORTED BACK ACROSS THE YEARS. HE WAS YOUNG, CAREFREE AND RIDING A SPIRITED KREED ACROSS THE ENDLESS PLAINS.

TOWARDS THE SETTING OF THE TWIN SUNS, THE THARVS SAW A GROUP OF THE TRIGAN DEFENDERS COMING FORWARD WITH A FLAG OF TRUCE.

HOLD YOUR FIRE. THEY WANT TO PARLEY.







FREE OF THE BURDENS OF A MIGHTY EMPIRE, HE GAVE HIMSELF UP TO THE DELIGHTS OF SIMPLE DANGER.
YAAAAAH!
SUDDENLY, THE FANTASY VANISHED AND HE WAS LOOKING INTO THE EYES OF HIS NEPHEW.
UNCLE...!
JANNO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
YOU DISCONNECTED THE ELECTRODES FROM MY HEAD. HOW DARE YOU!
UNCLE... I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
HOW CAN YOU BE LYING HERE WHILE THE EMPIRE IS CRUMBLING ALL AROUND YOU, THE THARVS ARE SURROUNDING THE CITY AND DEMANDING OUR IMMEDIATE SURRENDER? UNCLE, THIS ISN'T LIKE YOU!
WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF THE REAL ME, YOU YOUNG FOOL!
TRIGO SCRAWLED A NOTE.
THEY WANT OUR SURRENDER... THEY SHALL HAVE IT! THIS IS AN ORDER FOR ALL TRIGAN FORCES IN THE CITY TO LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS IMMEDIATELY. TAKE IT - ENFORCE IT!
I - I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
JANNO WATCHED IN PUZZLEMENT AS HIS UNCLE PICKED UP THE STRANGE BLACK BOX.
GET YOU GONE, NEPHEW. LEAVE ME TO MY OWN DEVICES...
THAT THING HE'S HOLDING... THAT'S THE KEY TO HIS FANTASTIC BEHAVIOUR!
AND THEN...
UUUUGH...!
I'LL TAKE THIS TO SOME-ONE WHO'LL BE ABLE TO DISCOVER WHAT POWER IT HAS OVER MY UNCLE.
BUT, AS HE LEFT THE RUINED WAR MINISTRY...
AFTER HIM - GET HIM!

JANNO MADE HIS WAY ACROSS THE RUBBLE OF THE BOMBARDED CITY, UNAWARE OF HIS PERIL.

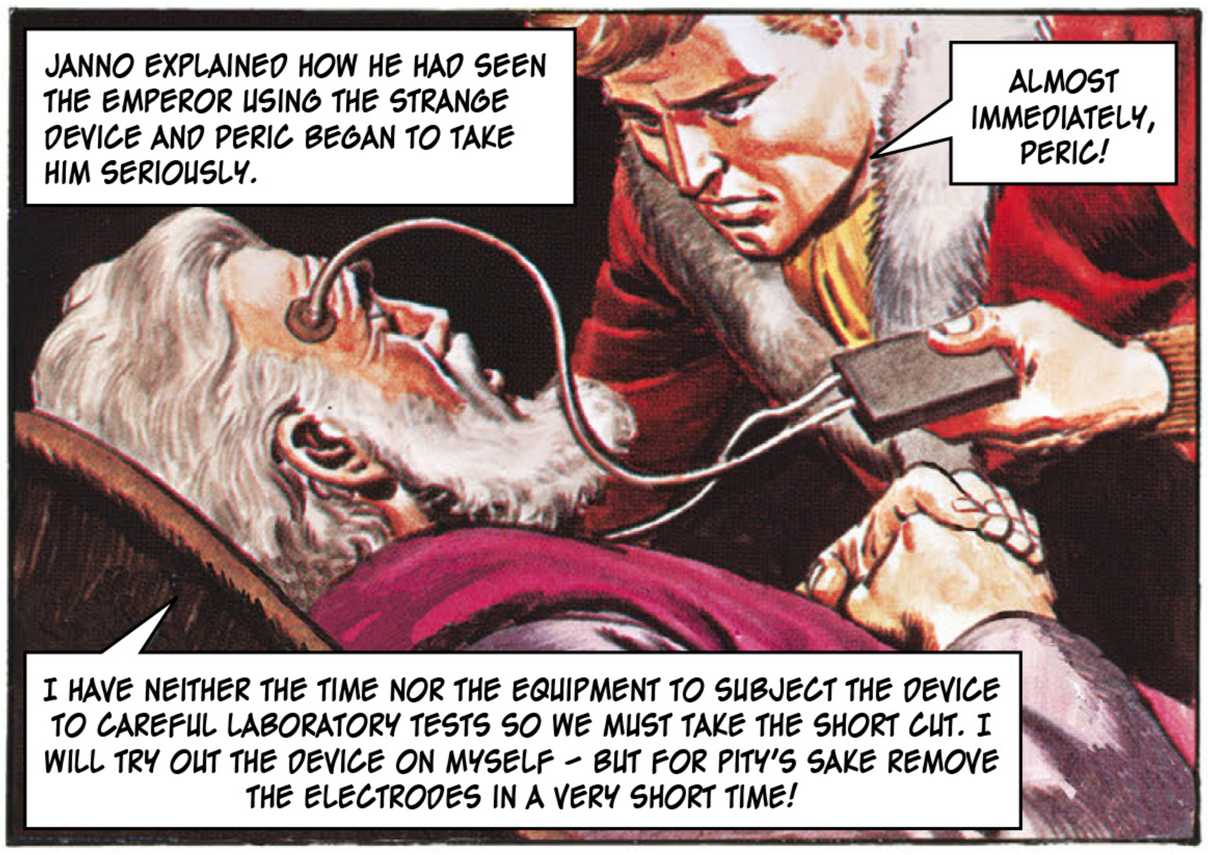
BY THE STARS!

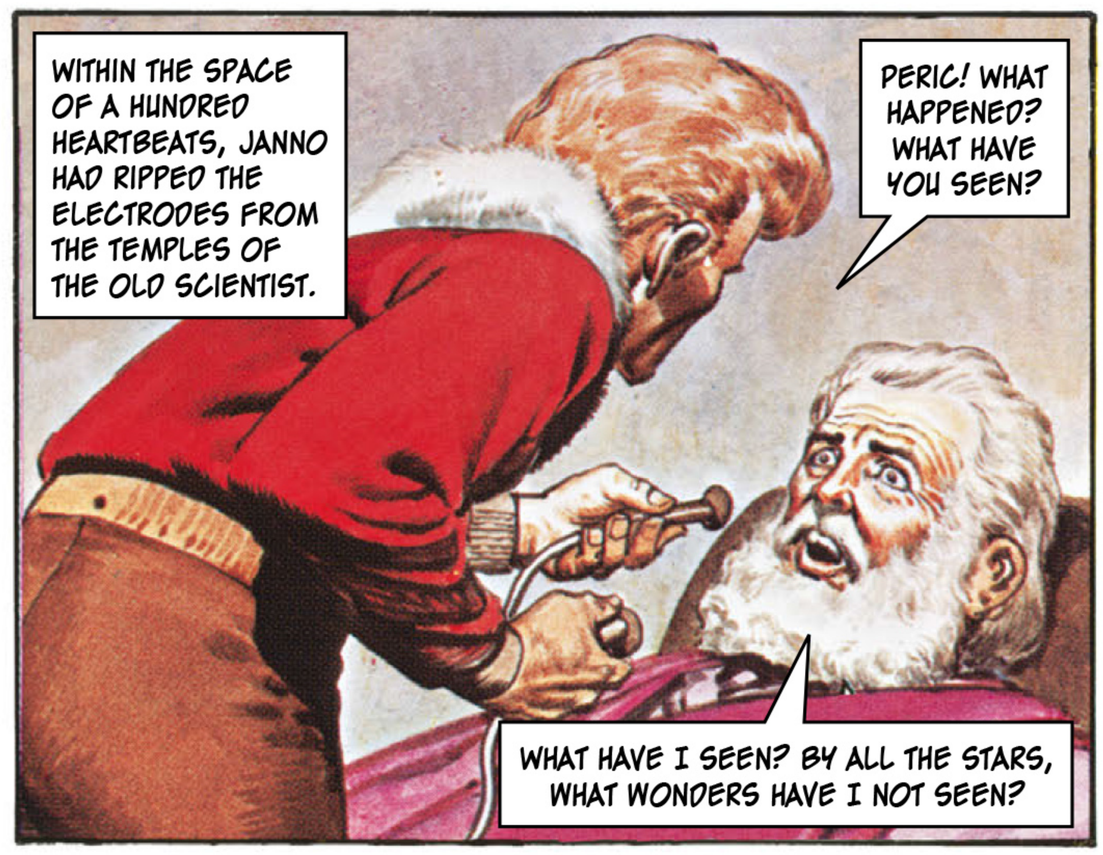
JANNO SPOTTED HIS ASSAILANT AND ZIPPED INTO ACTION.
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, MY FRIEND...

...BUT TAKE THAT!
AAAAAHHH!

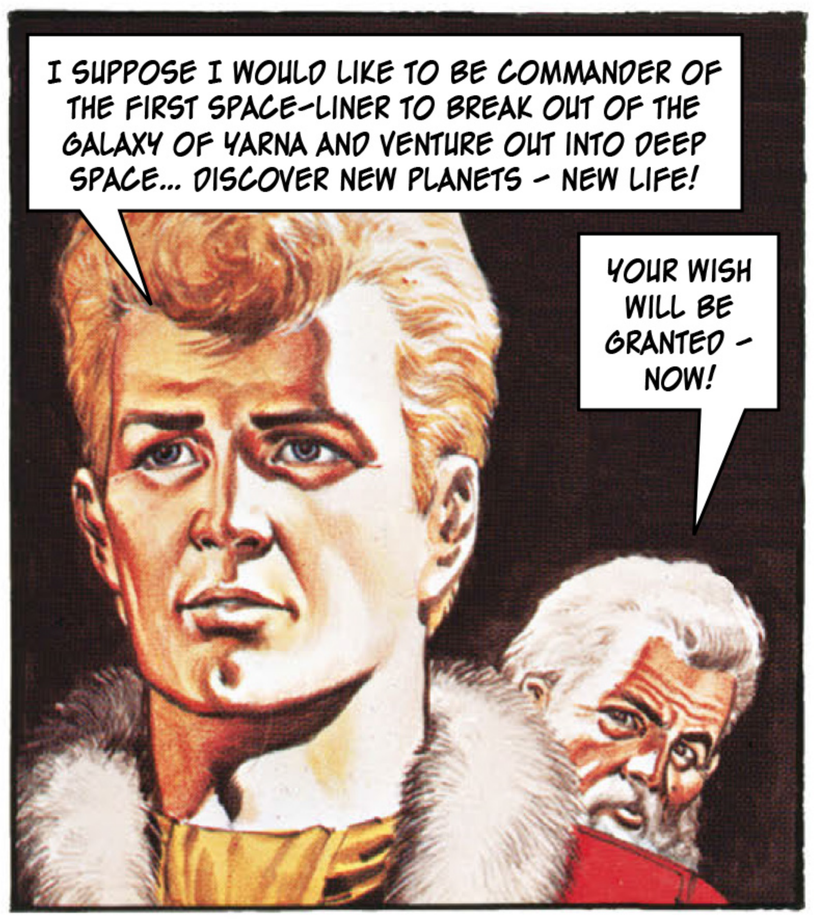
IT WAS NEARLY MIDNIGHT WHEN HE REACHED PERIC'S RUINED LABORATORY AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CITY. ELEKTON'S GREATEST SCIENTIST WAS GATHERING UP WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIS EQUIPMENT.
PERIC! THANK THE STARS YOU'RE STILL ALIVE!
ONLY JUST. AND THANKS TO THE FOLLY OF OUR PEOPLE ALL I HAVE WORKED FOR WILL SOON END UP IN A PILE OF RUBBLE!

I THINK I MAY HAVE FOUND THE CAUSE OF ALL OUR TROUBLES: THIS!
SOME KIND OF ELECTROMAGNETIC DEVICE WITH ELECTRODES? HAS THE PLIGHT OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE DRIVEN YOU MAD, MY YOUNG FRIEND?

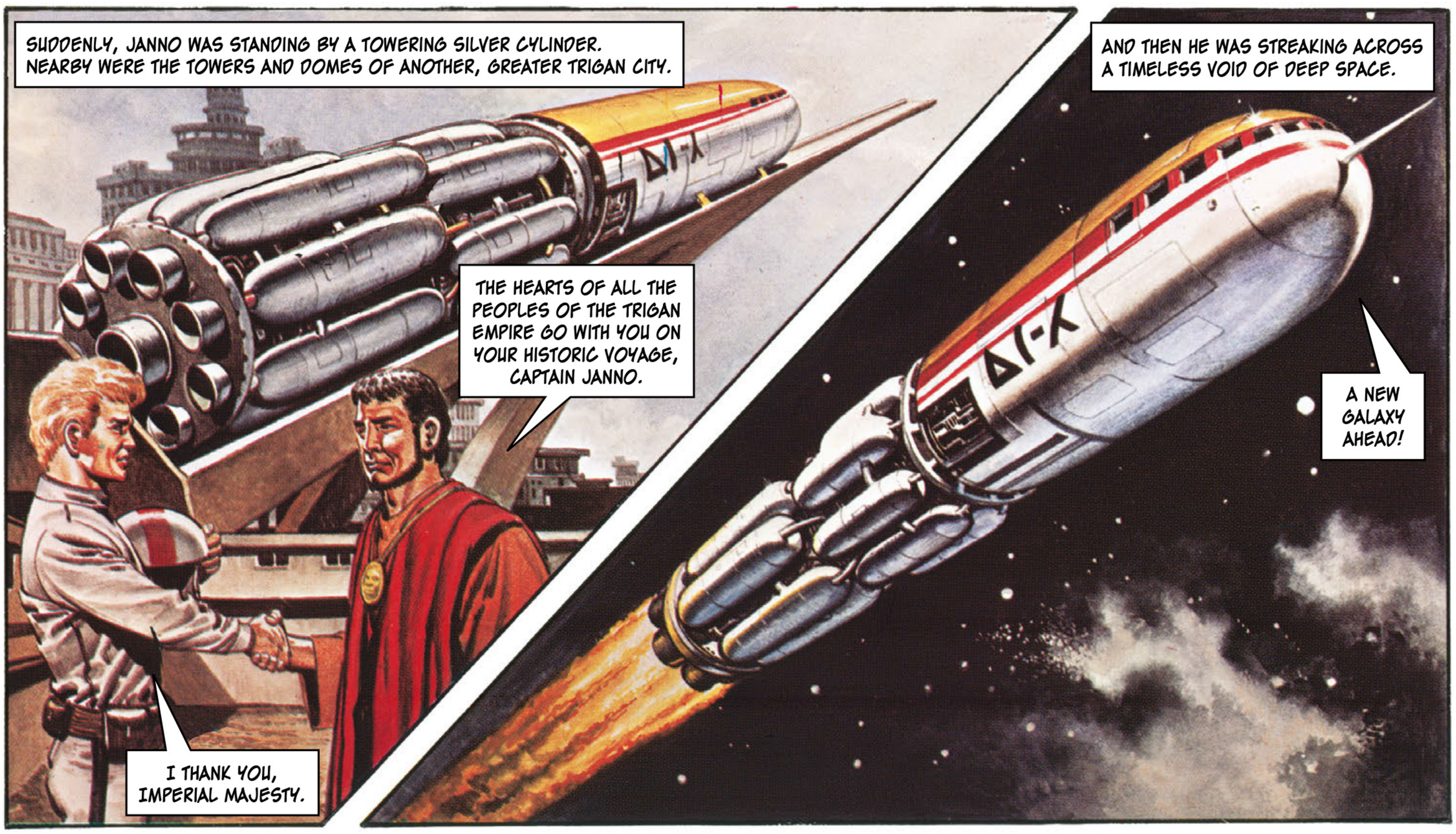

JANNO EXPLAINED HOW HE HAD SEEN THE EMPEROR USING THE STRANGE DEVICE AND PERIC BEGAN TO TAKE HIM SERIOUSLY.
ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, PERIC!
I HAVE NEITHER THE TIME NOR THE EQUIPMENT TO SUBJECT THE DEVICE TO CAREFUL LABORATORY TESTS SO WE MUST TAKE THE SHORT CUT. I WILL TRY OUT THE DEVICE ON MYSELF – BUT FOR PITY'S SAKE REMOVE THE ELECTRODES IN A VERY SHORT TIME!

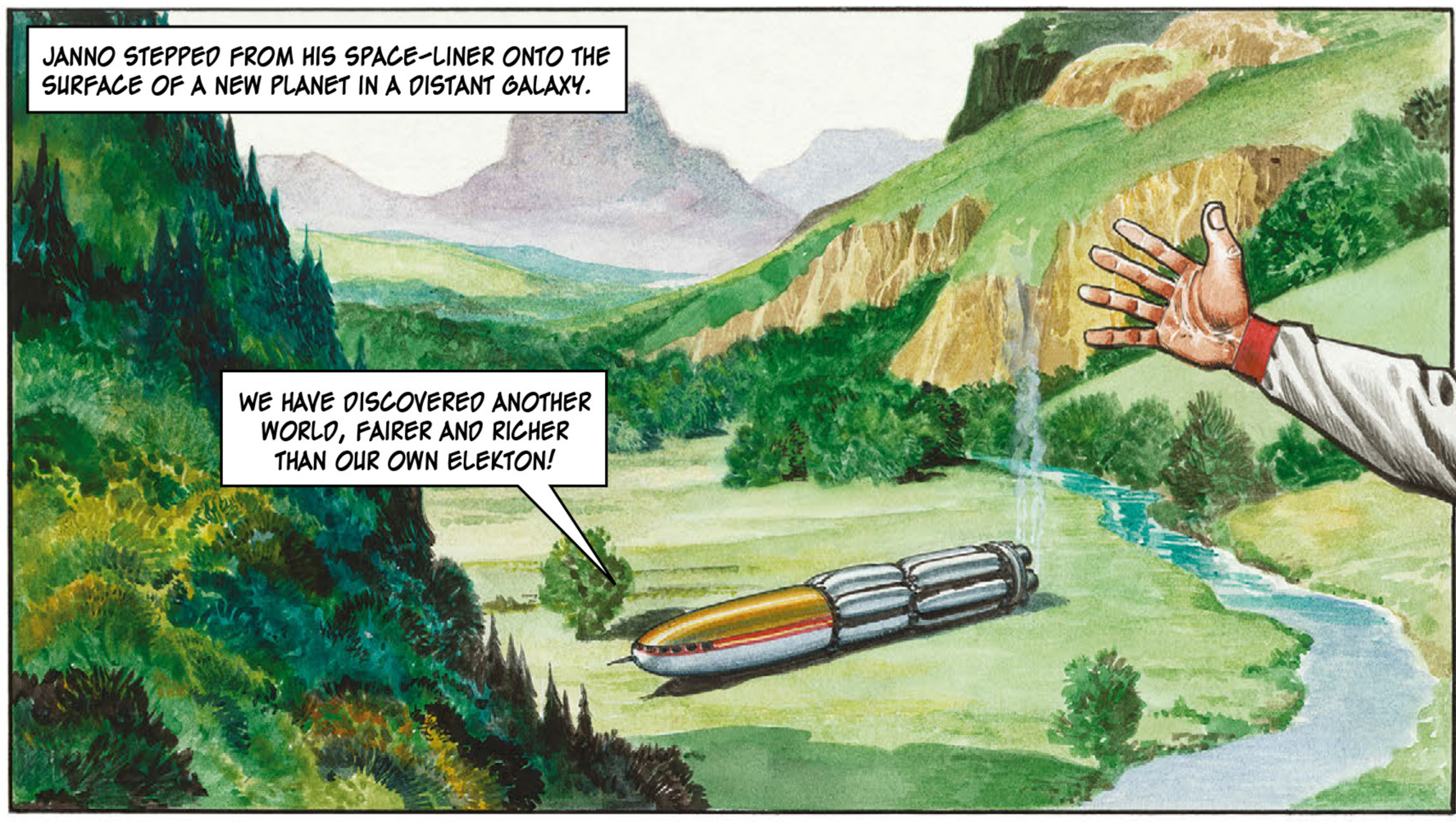

WITHIN THE SPACE OF A HUNDRED HEARTBEATS, JANNO HAD RIPPED THE ELECTRODES FROM THE TEMPLES OF THE OLD SCIENTIST.
PERIC! WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT HAVE YOU SEEN?
WHAT HAVE I SEEN? BY ALL THE STARS, WHAT WONDERS HAVE I NOT SEEN?

JANNO WAS SEIZED BY HIS OLD FRIEND'S STRANGE ECSTASY.
JANNO! THINK. THINK HARD! WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO, IF TIME AND SPACE WERE NO OBJECT.
I SUPPOSE... I SUPPOSE I WOULD LIKE TO LIVE A THOUSAND YEARS FROM NOW WHEN OUTER SPACE HAS BEEN CONQUERED.

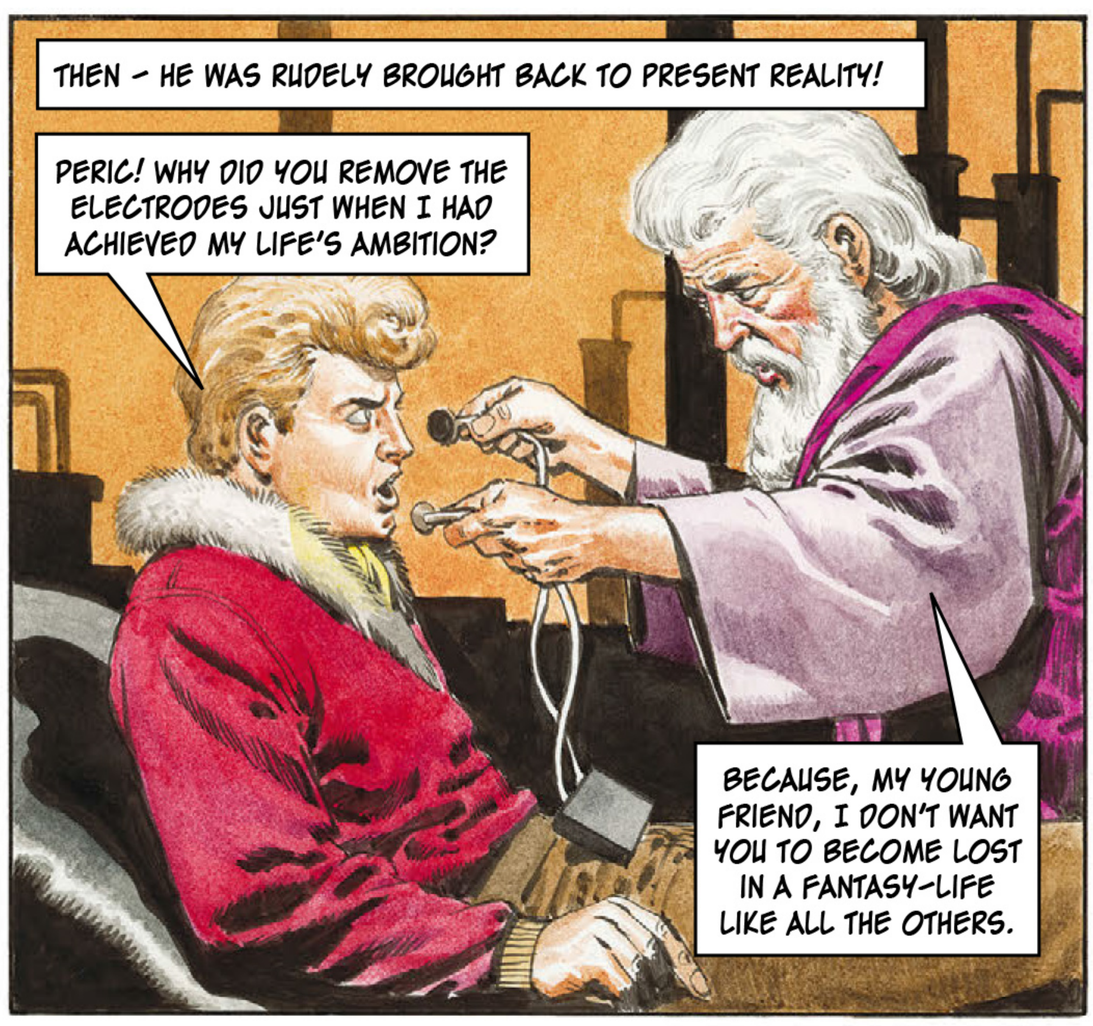

I SUPPOSE I WOULD LIKE TO BE COMMANDER OF THE FIRST SPACE-LINER TO BREAK OUT OF THE GALAXY OF YARNA AND VENTURE OUT INTO DEEP SPACE... DISCOVER NEW PLANETS – NEW LIFE!
YOUR WISH WILL BE GRANTED – NOW!

KEEP CALM. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.
BUT – WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME?

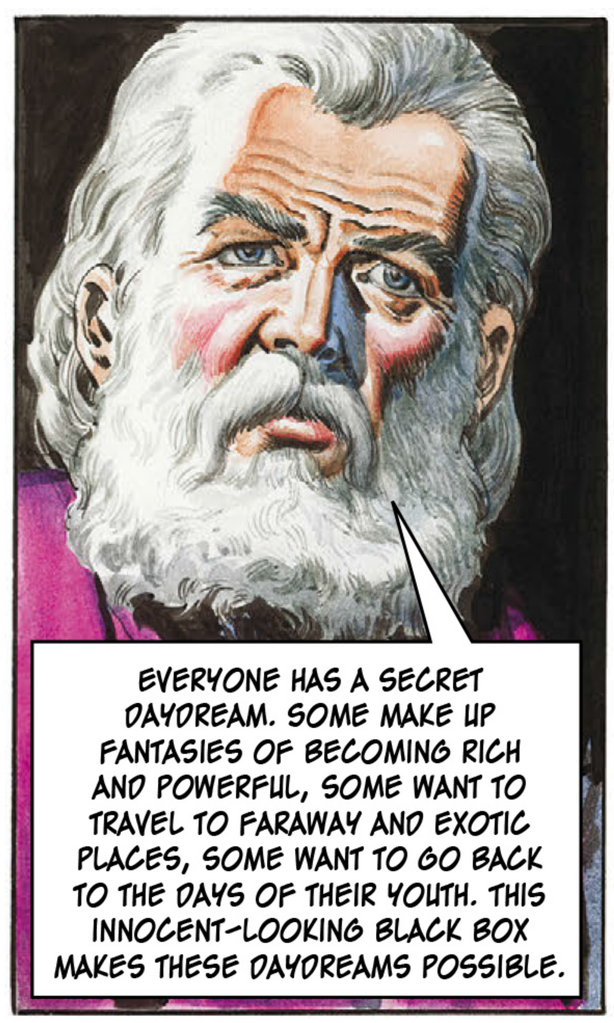

SUDDENLY, JANNO WAS STANDING BY A TOWERING SILVER CYLINDER. NEARBY WERE THE TOWERS AND DOMES OF ANOTHER, GREATER TRIGAN CITY.
THE HEARTS OF ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE GO WITH YOU ON YOUR HISTORIC VOYAGE, CAPTAIN JANNO.
I THANK YOU, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.
AND THEN HE WAS STREAKING ACROSS A TIMELESS VOID OF DEEP SPACE.
A NEW GALAXY AHEAD!

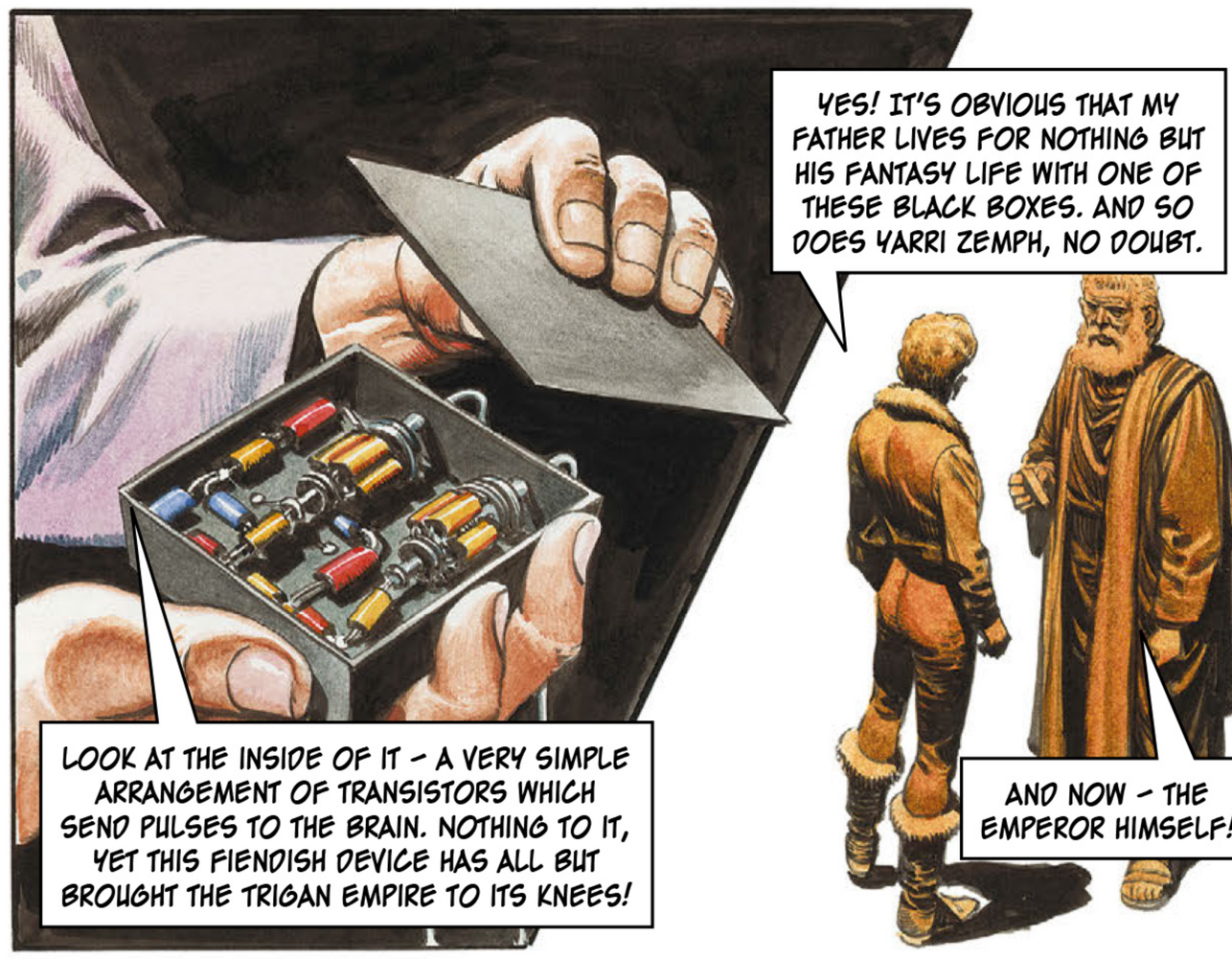

JANNO STEPPED FROM HIS SPACE-LINER ONTO THE SURFACE OF A NEW PLANET IN A DISTANT GALAXY.
WE HAVE DISCOVERED ANOTHER WORLD, FAIRER AND RICHER THAN OUR OWN ELEKTON!

I NAME THIS PLANET – TRIGANIA! AND I CLAIM IT IN THE NAME OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE!


THEN – HE WAS RUDELY BROUGHT BACK TO PRESENT REALITY!
PERIC! WHY DID YOU REMOVE THE ELECTRODES JUST WHEN I HAD ACHIEVED MY LIFE'S AMBITION?
BECAUSE, MY YOUNG FRIEND, I DON'T WANT YOU TO BECOME LOST IN A FANTASY-LIFE LIKE ALL THE OTHERS.

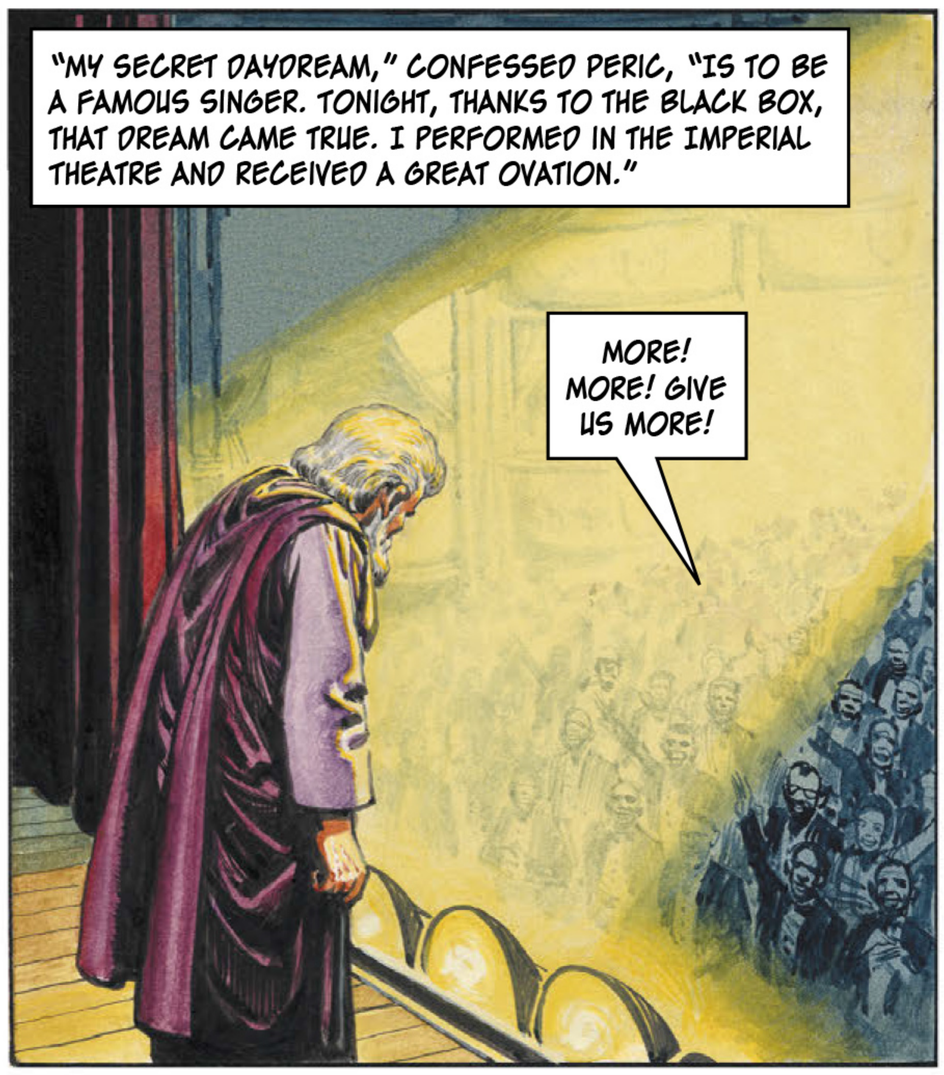
THE GREAT SCIENTIST EXPLAINED.
WHAT IS IT?
FOR WANT OF A BETTER NAME I WOULD CALL IT THE WISH-FULFILLER.


EVERYONE HAS A SECRET DAYDREAM. SOME MAKE UP FANTASIES OF BECOMING RICH AND POWERFUL, SOME WANT TO TRAVEL TO FARAWAY AND EXOTIC PLACES, SOME WANT TO GO BACK TO THE DAYS OF THEIR YOUTH. THIS INNOCENT-LOOKING BLACK BOX MAKES THESE DAYDREAMS POSSIBLE.


YES! IT'S OBVIOUS THAT MY FATHER LIVES FOR NOTHING BUT HIS FANTASY LIFE WITH ONE OF THESE BLACK BOXES. AND SO DOES YARRI ZEMPH, NO DOUBT.
LOOK AT THE INSIDE OF IT – A VERY SIMPLE ARRANGEMENT OF TRANSISTORS WHICH SEND PULSES TO THE BRAIN. NOTHING TO IT, YET THIS FIENDISH DEVICE HAS ALL BUT BROUGHT THE TRIGAN EMPIRE TO ITS KNEES!

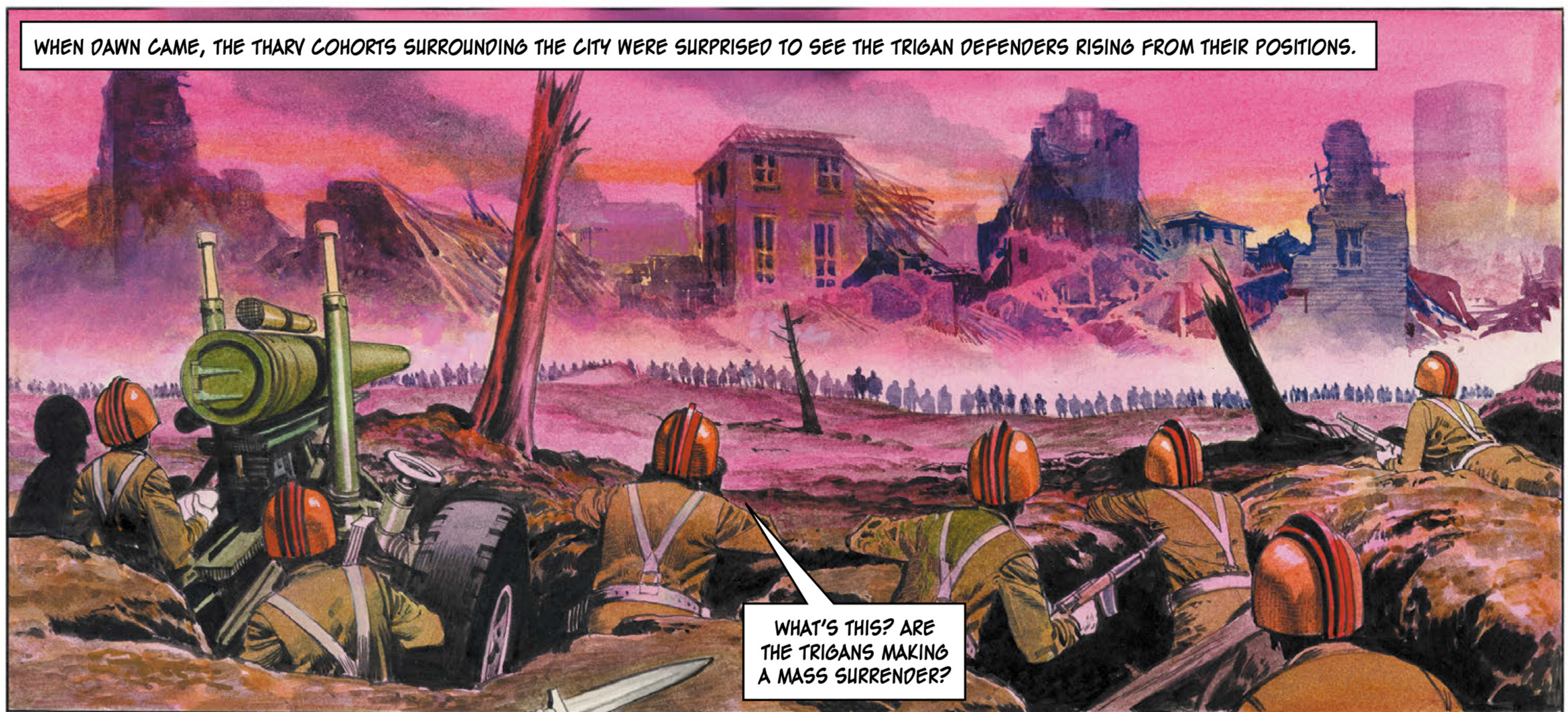
AND NOW – THE EMPEROR HIMSELF!

SOON, JANNO AND PERIC WERE CROSSING THE SHELL-TORN CITY.
TELL ME, WHAT IS YOUR SECRET DAYDREAM, PERIC?
YOU WILL LAUGH WHEN I REVEAL IT!


"MY SECRET DAYDREAM," CONFESSED PERIC, "IS TO BE A FAMOUS SINGER. TONIGHT, THANKS TO THE BLACK BOX, THAT DREAM CAME TRUE. I PERFORMED IN THE IMPERIAL THEATRE AND RECEIVED A GREAT OVATION."
MORE! MORE! GIVE US MORE!

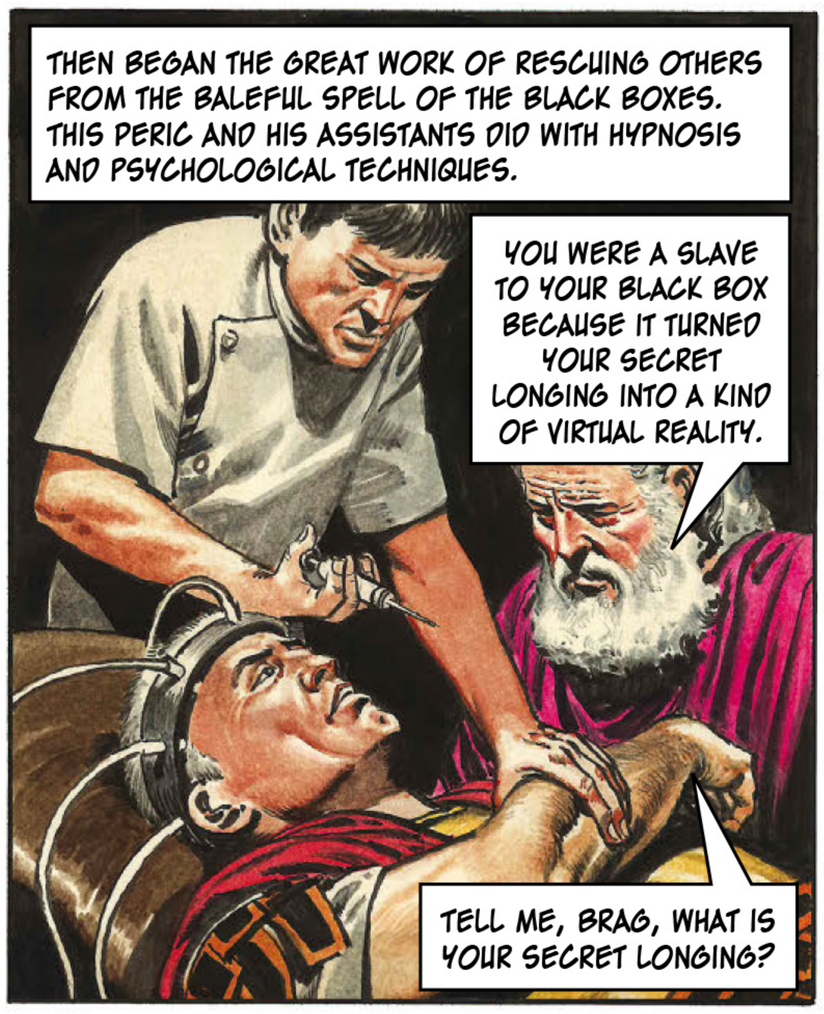
PRESENTLY, THEY CAME TO THE RUINED WAR MINISTRY WHERE THE EMPEROR TRIGO HAD JUST RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS.
JANNO! YOU TREACHEROUS YOUNG ANIMAL! I'LL KILL YOU WITH MY OWN HANDS FOR WHAT YOU DID!
NO, IMPERIAL MAJESTY! JANNO SAVED YOU. PERHAPS HE EVEN SAVED THE EMPIRE!

THE EMPEROR'S VOICE WAS RAISED IN A WAIL OF ENTREATY.
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT. I WON'T HARM JANNO! BUT WHERE'S MY BLACK BOX? I WANT MY BLACK BOX!
YOU CAN HAVE YOUR BLACK BOX BACK. BUT FIRST YOU MUST EARN IT. BY DEFEATING THE THARVS!


WHEN DAWN CAME, THE THARV COHORTS SURROUNDING THE CITY WERE SURPRISED TO SEE THE TRIGAN DEFENDERS RISING FROM THEIR POSITIONS.
WHAT'S THIS? ARE THE TRIGANS MAKING A MASS SURRENDER?

THE WALK BECAME A RUN AND THE RUN BECAME A CHARGE. THE TRIGANS HURLED THEMSELVES AT THE ENEMY WITH TRIGO AT THEIR HEAD!
LONG LIVE THE TRIGAN EMPIRE!
DON LAWRENCE.

WITH ALL THE DEATHLESS COURAGE OF THE VORG HUNTERS FROM WHOM THEY WERE DESCENDED, THE TRIGANS THREW THEMSELVES AT THE THARVS.
TRIGAN FOR EVER!
THE EMPEROR DEFEATED THE THARV GENERAL IN HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT.
GIVE THE ORDER TO SURRENDER OR PREPARE TO MEET YOUR ANCESTORS!
YES – I WILL DO IT!
FIRED BY TRIGO'S EXAMPLE, THE TRIGANS HURLED BACK THE ENEMY ON EVERY FRONTIER. THARV SUED FOR PEACE AND THE PERIL WAS OVER.
LONG LIVE THE EMPEROR!
AND THEN TRIGO HAD A REQUEST TO MAKE OF PERIC.
NOW YOU WILL GIVE ME BACK MY BLACK BOX.
THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I THOUGHT THAT LIFE WOULD BE MEANINGLESS WITHOUT THIS DEVICE. BUT I HAVE HAD TO LIVE WITHOUT IT FOR TWO DAYS AND NOW THE CRAVING HAS LESSENED...
THERE! I AM FREE OF ITS DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE!


THEN BEGAN THE GREAT WORK OF RESCUING OTHERS FROM THE BALEFUL SPELL OF THE BLACK BOXES. THIS PERIC AND HIS ASSISTANTS DID WITH HYPNOSIS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES.
YOU WERE A SLAVE TO YOUR BLACK BOX BECAUSE IT TURNED YOUR SECRET LONGING INTO A KIND OF VIRTUAL REALITY.
TELL ME, BRAG, WHAT IS YOUR SECRET LONGING?

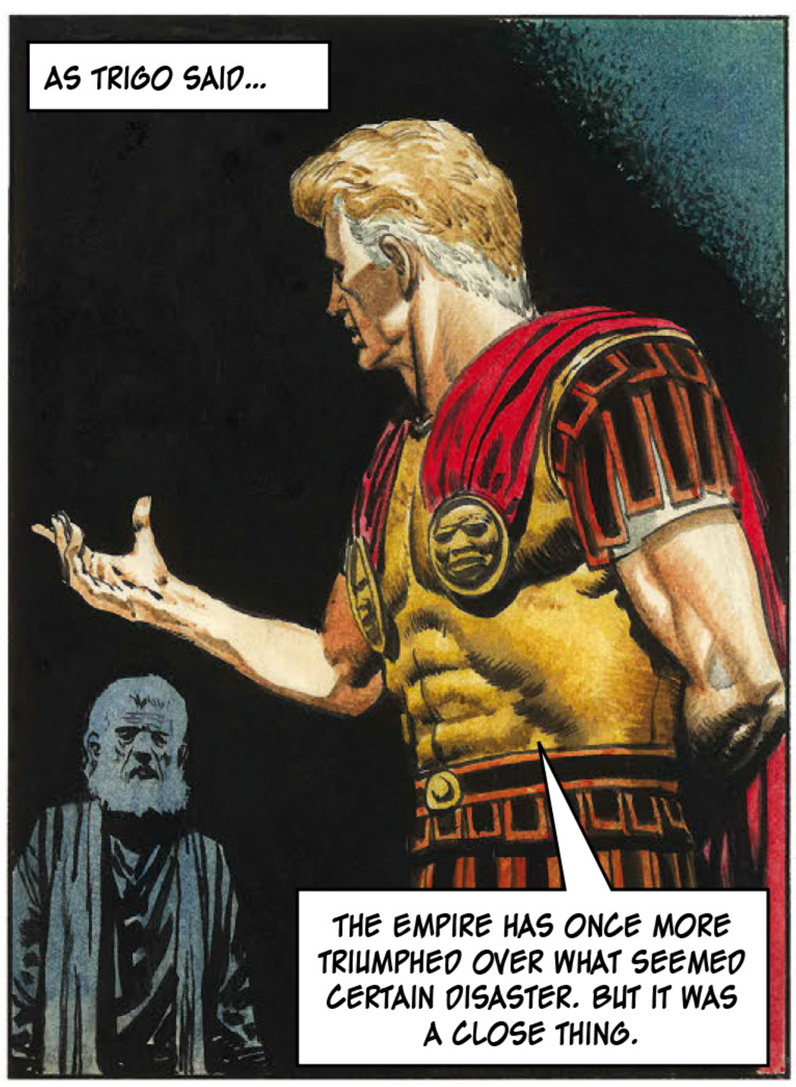
MANY WERE THE STRANGE CONFESSIONS THAT PERIC HEARD. FROM BRAG, FOR INSTANCE...
I ALWAYS HAD AN AMBITION TO BE A GREAT SCULPTOR. UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE BLACK BOX I CARVED A MOUNTAIN INTO A STATUE OF TRIGO!

FROM YARRI ZEMPH...
I HAVE BEEN A CIVIL SERVANT – A LITTLE GREY MAN – ALL MY LIFE. BUT WITH THE AID OF THE BLACK BOX I LIVED LIKE A BARBARIAN CHIEFTAIN.

FROM KEREN...
IN MY FANTASY I FLEW LIKE A BIRD ALL OVER ELEKTON...

AND FROM ROFFA...
I BECAME – A GOD!

THE TRIGAN POLICE FOUND THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE CRIMINAL GANG THAT HAD MANUFACTURED AND SOLD FOR ENORMOUS PRICES THOUSANDS OF THE INFERNAL LITTLE BLACK BOXES.
THEIR METHOD WAS FIENDISHLY SIMPLE. THE VICTIM'S FIRST INTRODUCTION WAS TO HAVE THIS THING ATTACHED TO HIS HEAD BY FORCE!
AFTER THAT, HE BECAME ITS SLAVE – AND PAID ANYTHING TO KEEP IT!


AS TRIGO SAID...
THE EMPIRE HAS ONCE MORE TRIUMPHED OVER WHAT SEEMED CERTAIN DISASTER. BUT IT WAS A CLOSE THING.

XXXV

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

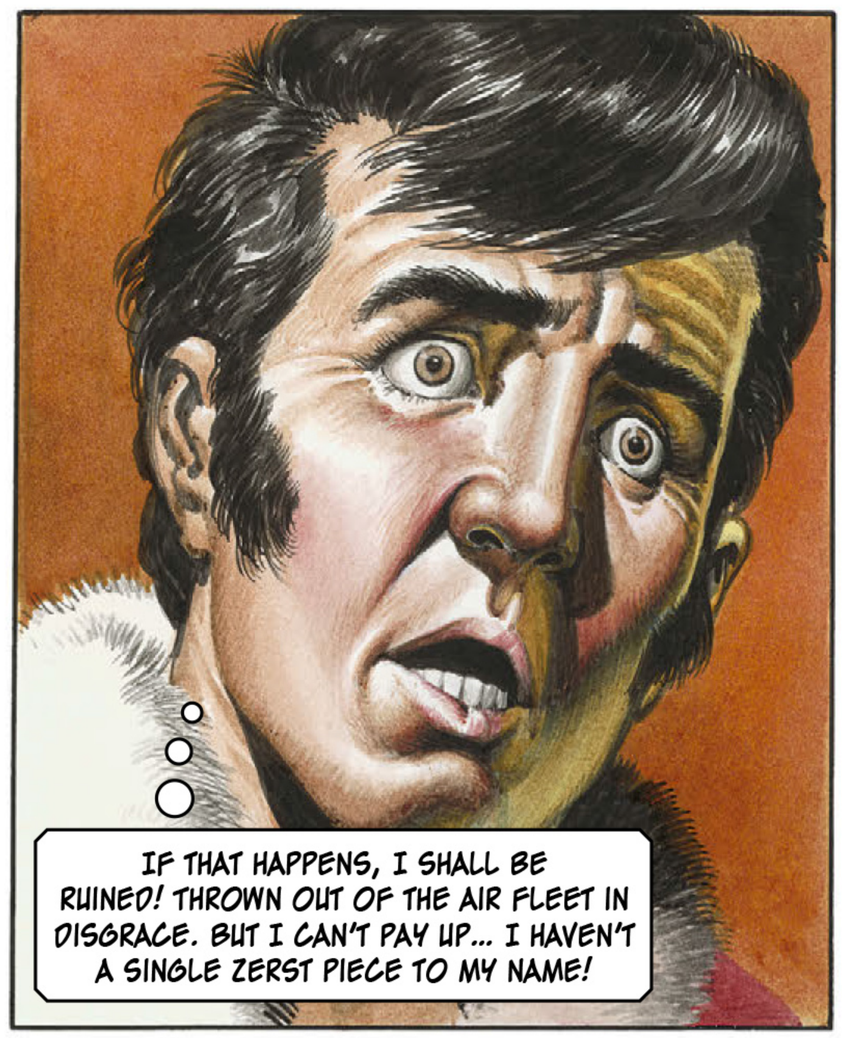
THE HYDRO MAN

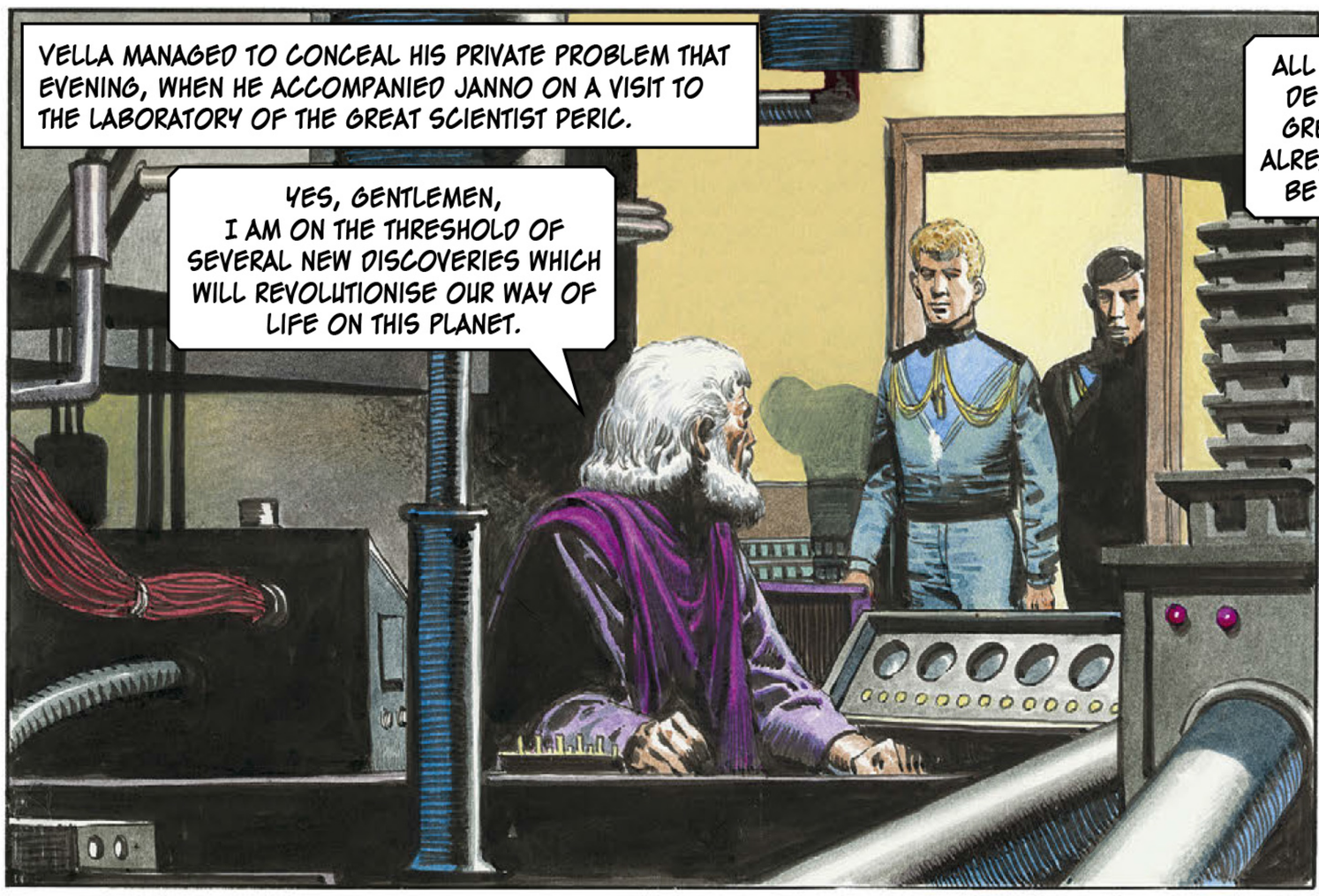
Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 550-558

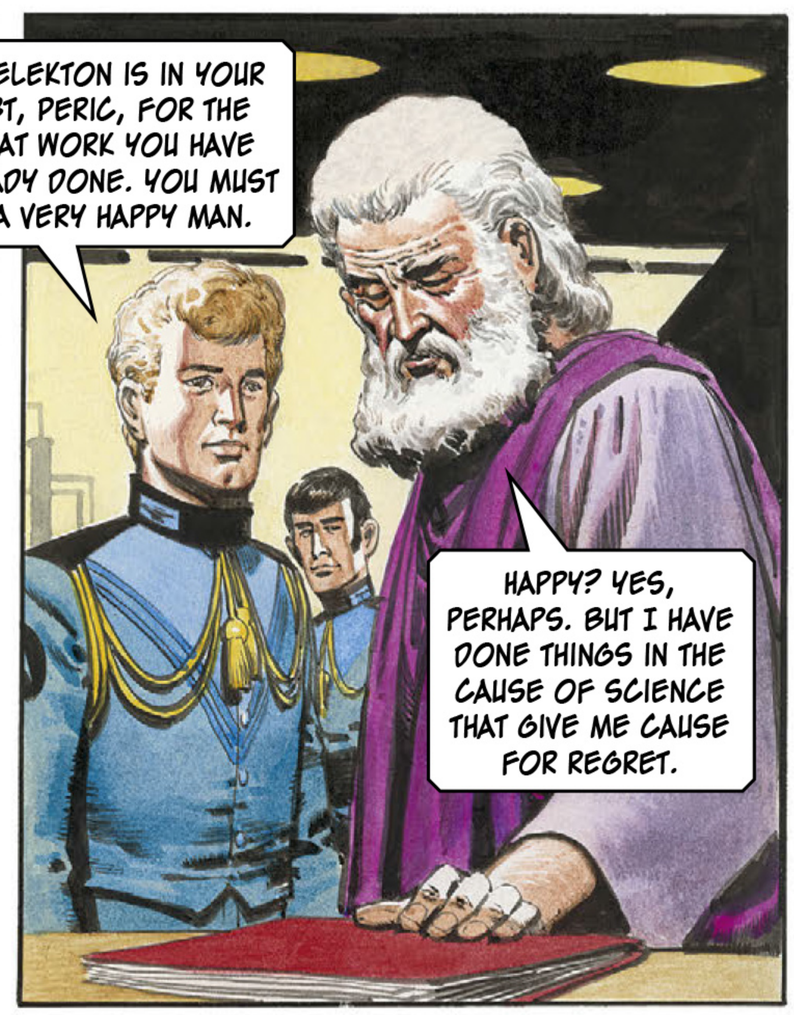
29th July 1972 – 23th September 1972

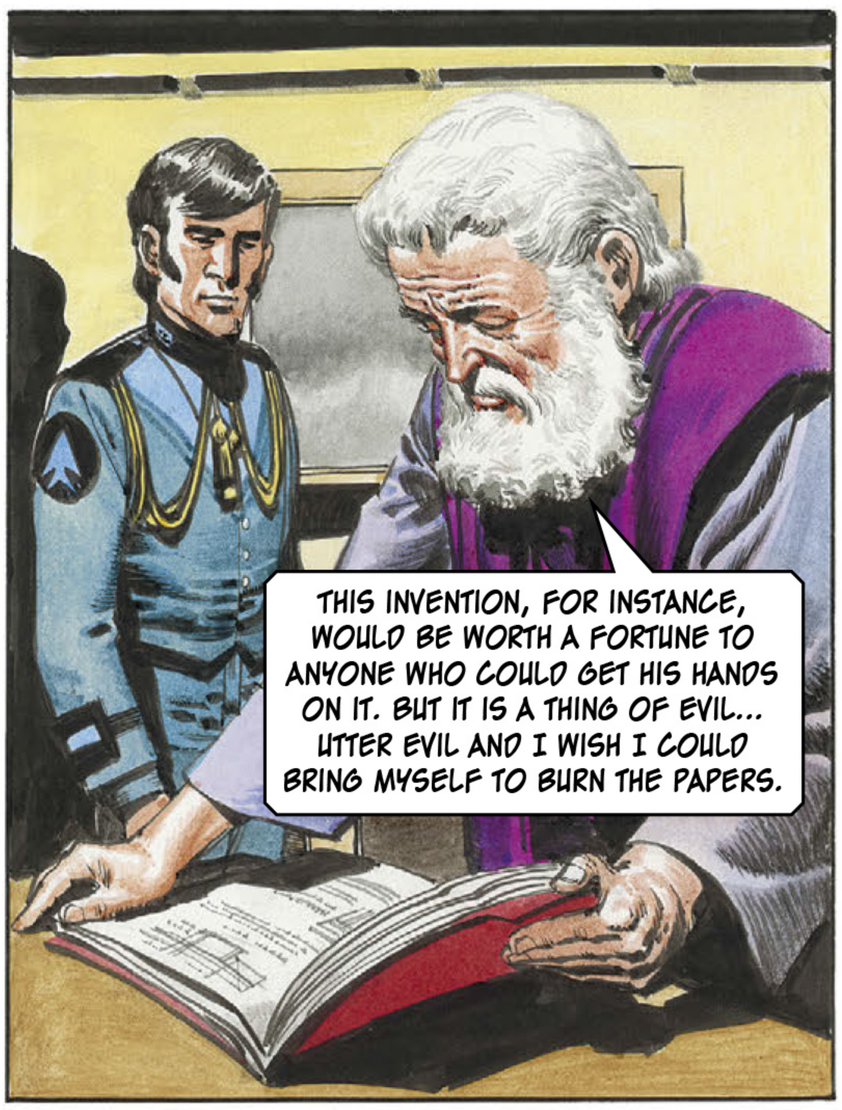
EACH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE EMPIRE, THE TRIGAN AIR FLEET GAVE A THRILLING DISPLAY OVER THE IMPERIAL CITY.
THIS PARTICULAR YEAR, THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE DISPLAY WAS A DEMONSTRATION OF AEROBATICS BY TWO FIGHTER-CRAFT CHAINED TOGETHER!
THE EMPEROR TRIGO AND HIS BROTHER BRAG WATCHED FROM THE BALCONY OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE.
THAT LAD OF YOURS AND YOUNG VELLA ARE THE FINEST PILOTS IN THE AIR FLEET... AND THEY'VE GOT THAT BLIND COURAGE OF YOUTH, ALRIGHT!
HUMPH! I'VE DONE SOME CRAZY THINGS IN MY TIME BUT NOTHING ON ELEKTON WOULD INDUCE ME TO TRY THAT TRICK!
LATER, THE TWO CRAFT LANDED. JANNO AND HIS COMRADE VELLA GRINNED ACROSS AT EACH OTHER.
THANK THE STARS THAT'S OVER!
AGREED! WE MUST NEVER TRY THAT AGAIN – EVENTUAL DISASTER IS A MATHEMATICAL CERTAINTY!
MOMENTS LATER, VELLA WAS ACCOSTED.
A FEW WORDS IN YOUR EAR, LIEUTENANT! MESSAGE FROM A FRIEND!
OH?
HOW DARE YOU COME HERE ON THE AIR BASE? DO YOU PEOPLE WANT TO RUIN ME?
IT MIGHT COME TO THAT, LIEUTENANT – UNLESS YOU PAY UP LIKE A GENTLEMAN!

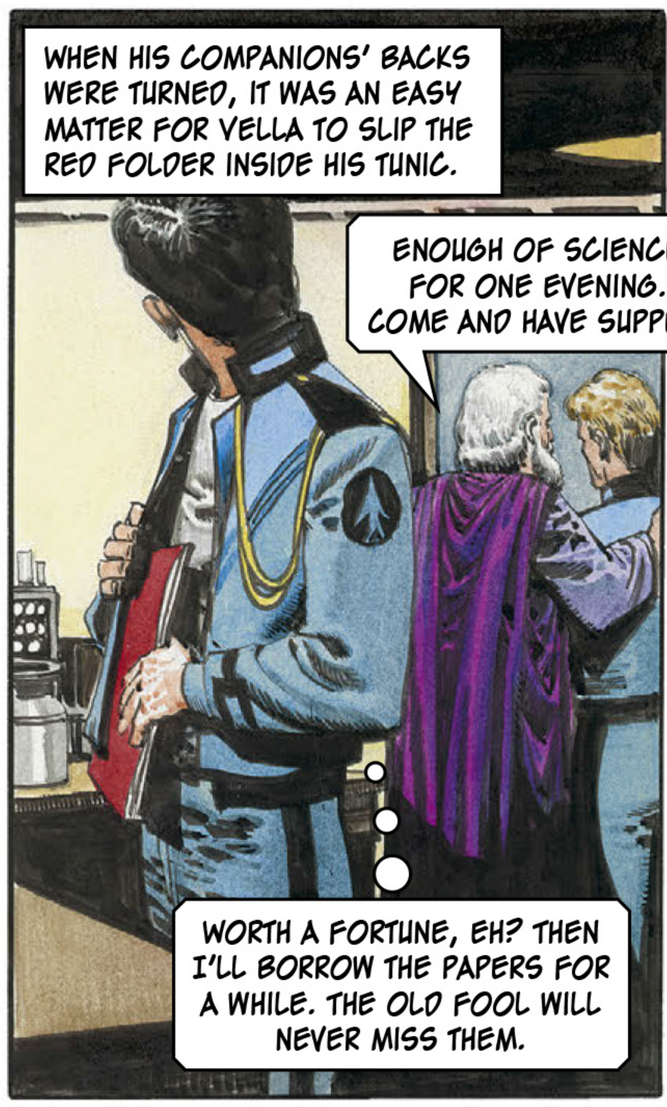
GIVE ME TIME... PLEASE!
YOU'VE HAD TIME! THE MESSAGE IS THAT, UNLESS YOU SETTLE YOUR DEBTS BY THE END OF THE LUNAR MONTH, LORD JANNO WILL BE TOLD THAT HIS COMRADE IS A GAMBLER AND A CHEAT!


IF THAT HAPPENS, I SHALL BE RUINED! THROWN OUT OF THE AIR FLEET IN DISGRACE. BUT I CAN'T PAY UP... I HAVEN'T A SINGLE ZERST PIECE TO MY NAME!


VELLA MANAGED TO CONCEAL HIS PRIVATE PROBLEM THAT EVENING, WHEN HE ACCOMPANIED JANNO ON A VISIT TO THE LABORATORY OF THE GREAT SCIENTIST PERIC.
YES, GENTLEMEN, I AM ON THE THRESHOLD OF SEVERAL NEW DISCOVERIES WHICH WILL REVOLUTIONISE OUR WAY OF LIFE ON THIS PLANET.


ALL ELEKTON IS IN YOUR DEBT, PERIC, FOR THE GREAT WORK YOU HAVE ALREADY DONE. YOU MUST BE A VERY HAPPY MAN.
HAPPY? YES, PERHAPS. BUT I HAVE DONE THINGS IN THE CAUSE OF SCIENCE THAT GIVE ME CAUSE FOR REGRET.

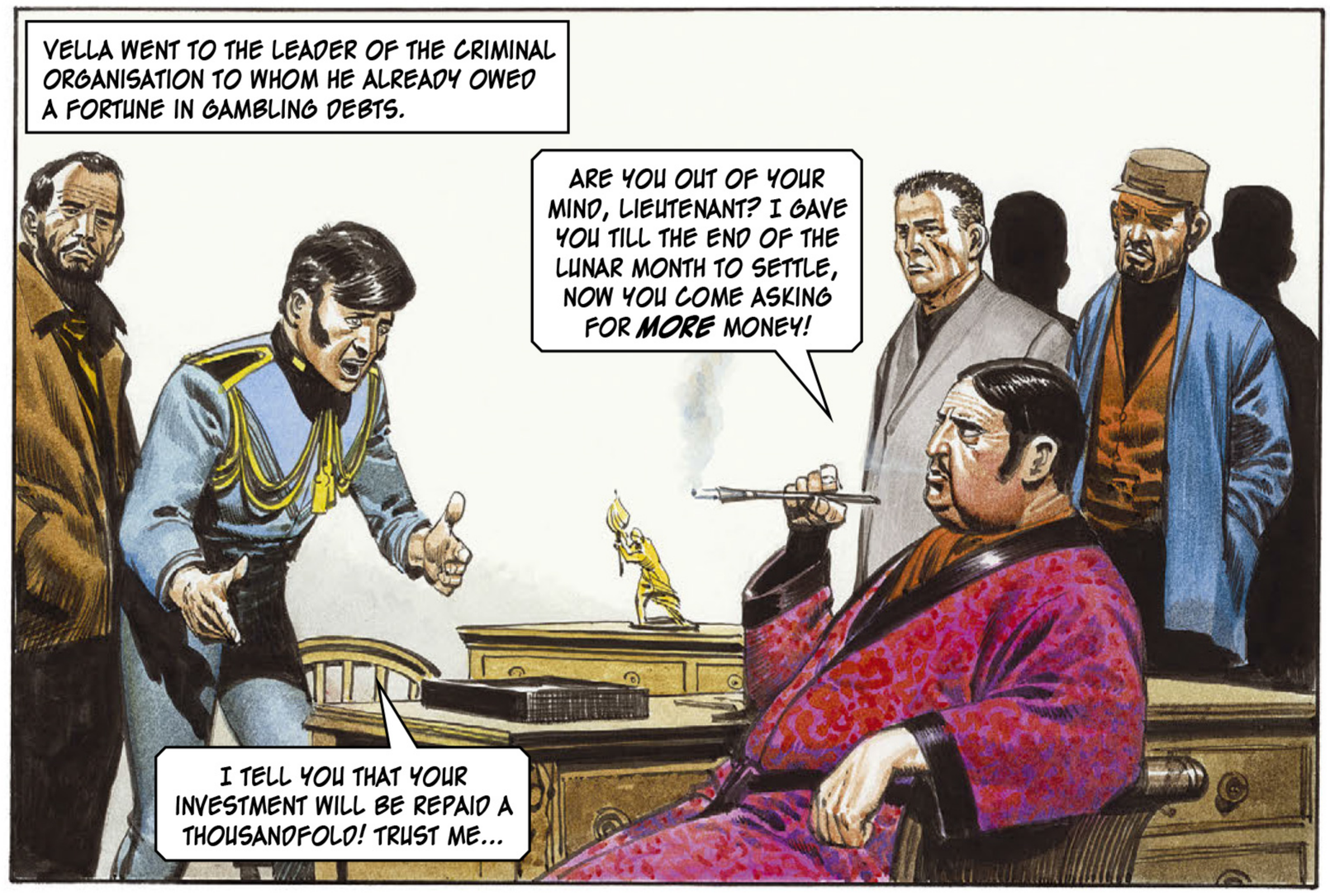

THIS INVENTION, FOR INSTANCE, WOULD BE WORTH A FORTUNE TO ANYONE WHO COULD GET HIS HANDS ON IT. BUT IT IS A THING OF EVIL... UTTER EVIL AND I WISH I COULD BRING MYSELF TO BURN THE PAPERS.


WHEN HIS COMPANIONS' BACKS WERE TURNED, IT WAS AN EASY MATTER FOR VELLA TO SLIP THE RED FOLDER INSIDE HIS TUNIC.
ENOUGH OF SCIENCE FOR ONE EVENING. COME AND HAVE SUPPER.
WORTH A FORTUNE, EH? THEN I'LL BORROW THE PAPERS FOR A WHILE. THE OLD FOOL WILL NEVER MISS THEM.

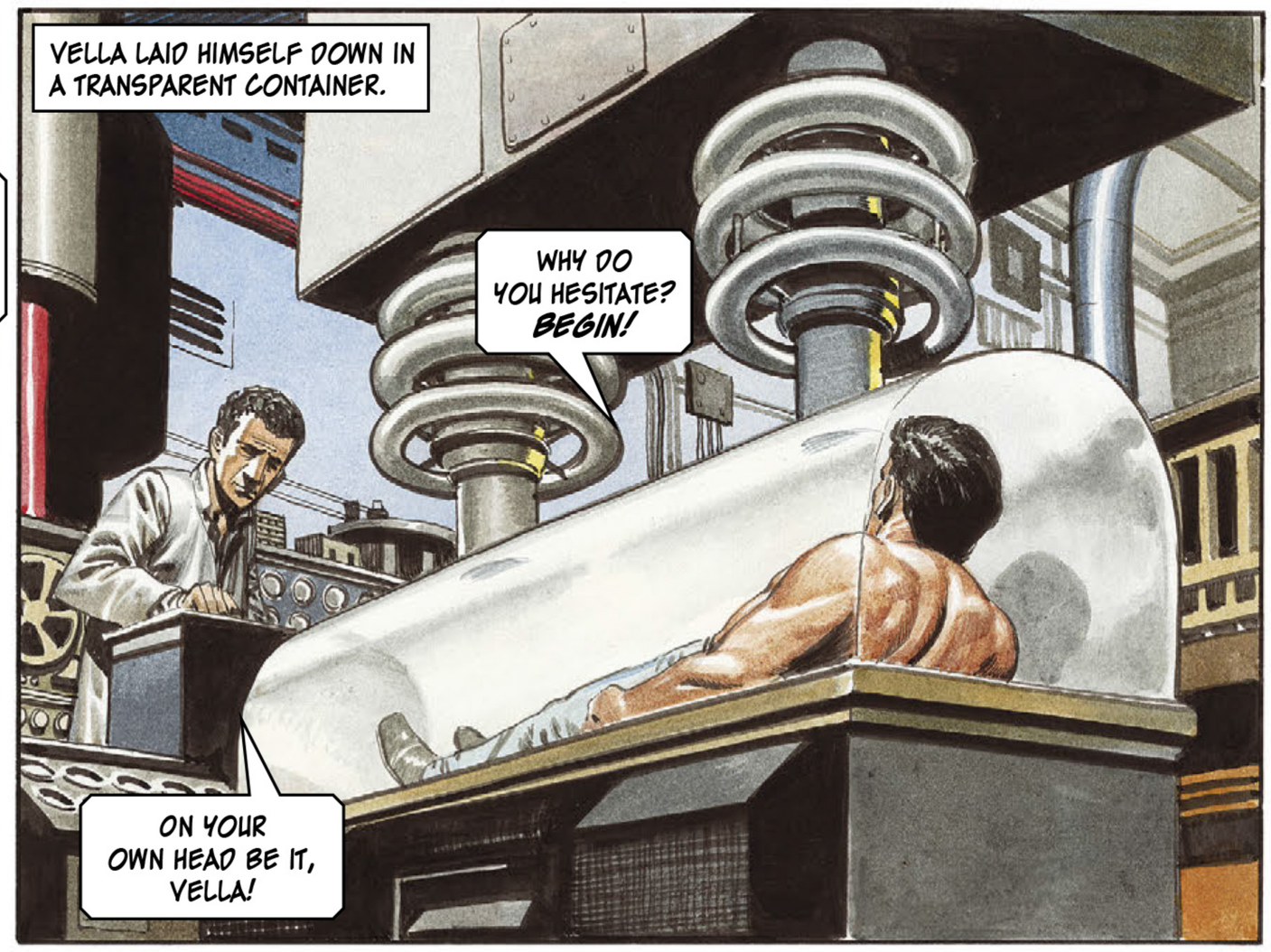
THAT NIGHT, VELLA STUDIED THE CONTENTS OF THE PURLOINED FOLDER. WHEN DAWN CAME, HE WAS FILLED WITH MINGLED TRIUMPH AND TERROR.
EITHER PERIC IS RAVING MAD, OR WHAT I HAVE HERE IS THE KEY TO RICHES BEYOND BELIEF...
...IF ONLY I HAVE THE COURAGE TO SUBMIT MYSELF TO THE DREADFUL EXPERIMENT DESCRIBED HERE!

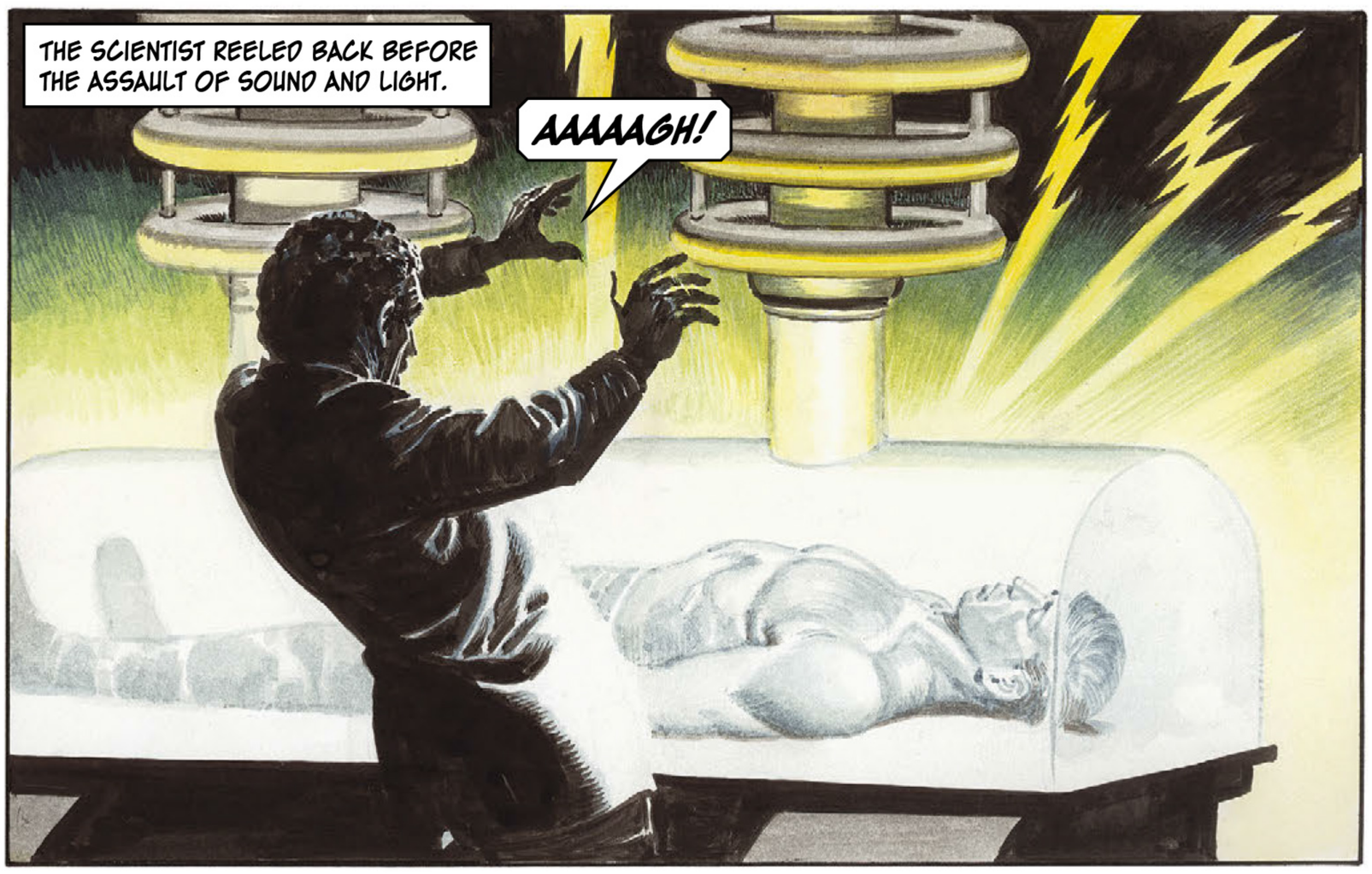
THE DREADED PENAL MINES WERE THE DISGRACE OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. THERE, THE EMPIRE'S WORST CRIMINALS WERE SENT TO SLAVE THEMSELVES TO DEATH. NONE ESCAPED...
UNTIL...
WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
SHUT YOUR MOUTH! DO EVERY-THING I SAY!
IN LESS TIME THAN IT TAKES TO TELL, THE ASTOUNDED CONVICT WAS SEATED IN A FAST VEHICLE THAT WAS DRIVING HIM THROUGH THE NIGHT TOWARDS TRIGAN CITY.
WE MUST GET INTO THE CITY BEFORE THE GENERAL ALARM'S RAISED AND ROAD BLOCKS ARE SET UP!
THERE WERE NO COMPLICATIONS. BEFORE DAWN, THE ESCAPED MAN WAS IN VELLA'S COMFORTABLE APARTMENT.
YOU? AN AIR FLEET OFFICER? WHY HAVE YOU DONE THIS FOR ME?
NOT FOR YOU, MY FRIEND - BUT FOR ME! I NEED YOU!
YOU ARE - OR WERE - ZERROS, THE SCIENTIST. POSSIBLY THE GREATEST SCIENTIST ON ELEKTON AFTER PERIC, TILL YOU WERE CONDEMNED FOR LIFE FOR SELLING SECRETS TO TRIGAN'S ENEMIES. I HAVE A JOB FOR YOU. READ THIS!
ZERROS SCANNED THE CONTENTS OF THE RED FOLDER. IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE HE WAS STARING IN HORROR AT HIS COMPANION.
IT'S INSANE!... DIABOLICAL!... I'LL HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT!
YOU WILL CONDUCT THAT EXPERIMENT, USING ME AS THE SUBJECT - OR BACK TO THE MINES YOU GO!

ANYTHING BUT THE MINES! ANYTHING! BUT IT WILL TAKE TIME AND MONEY TO CONSTRUCT THE APPARATUS FOR THE EXPERIMENT.
TIME WE HAVE PLENTY OF... MONEY I WILL GET!


VELLA WENT TO THE LEADER OF THE CRIMINAL ORGANISATION TO WHOM HE ALREADY OWED A FORTUNE IN GAMBLING DEBTS.
ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND, LIEUTENANT? I GAVE YOU TILL THE END OF THE LUNAR MONTH TO SETTLE, NOW YOU COME ASKING FOR MORE MONEY!
I TELL YOU THAT YOUR INVESTMENT WILL BE REPAID A THOUSANDFOLD! TRUST ME...

HE GOT THE MONEY. BY THE END OF THE LUNAR MONTH, HIS APARTMENT WAS FILLED WITH STRANGE APPARATUS.
IT IS READY. BUT I MUST ASK YOU TO RECONSIDER...
YOU WILL CONDUCT THE EXPERIMENT IMMEDIATELY.


VELLA LAID HIMSELF DOWN IN A TRANSPARENT CONTAINER.
WHY DO YOU HESITATE? BEGIN!
ON YOUR OWN HEAD BE IT, VELLA!


THE SCIENTIST REELED BACK BEFORE THE ASSAULT OF SOUND AND LIGHT.
AAAAAGH!

AND WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER...
IT CAN'T BE TRUE!... IT CAN'T!

THE APPARATUS FELL SILENT. ZERROS TREMBLINGLY APPROACHED THE TRANSPARENT CONTAINER. WHERE VELLA HAD LAIN WAS NOW ONLY ... WATER!

LIEUTENANT VELLA. CAN YOU HEAR ME?

OF COURSE I CAN! NOW TIP THIS CONTAINER OVER AS INSTRUCTED.

ARE YOU... ALL RIGHT?

NEVER FELT BETTER IN MY LIFE!

A SAVAGE NUROT – ONE OF ELEKTON'S MORE UNPLEASANT VERMIN – WAS TETHERED AT THE FAR END OF THE MAKESHIFT LABORATORY. THE STREAM OF WATER SNAKED DELIBERATELY TOWARDS THE ANIMAL.

THE NUROT'S FANGED JAWS DESCENDED TO GULP AT THE WATER. IN THAT INSTANT – IT HAPPENED!

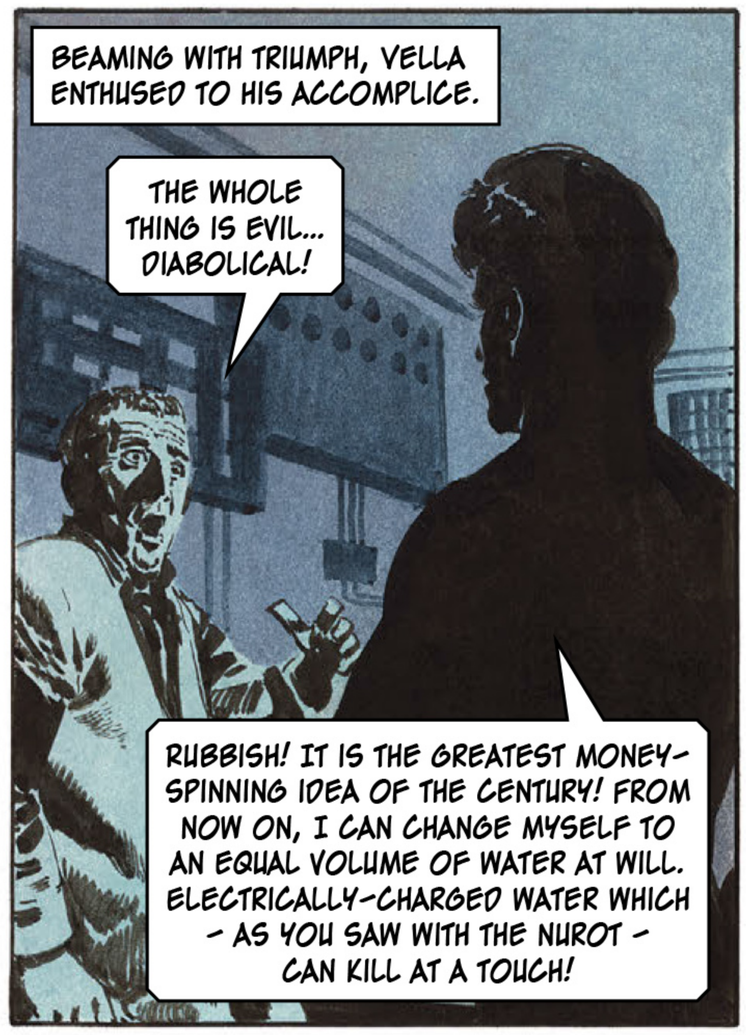
HEH! HEH!

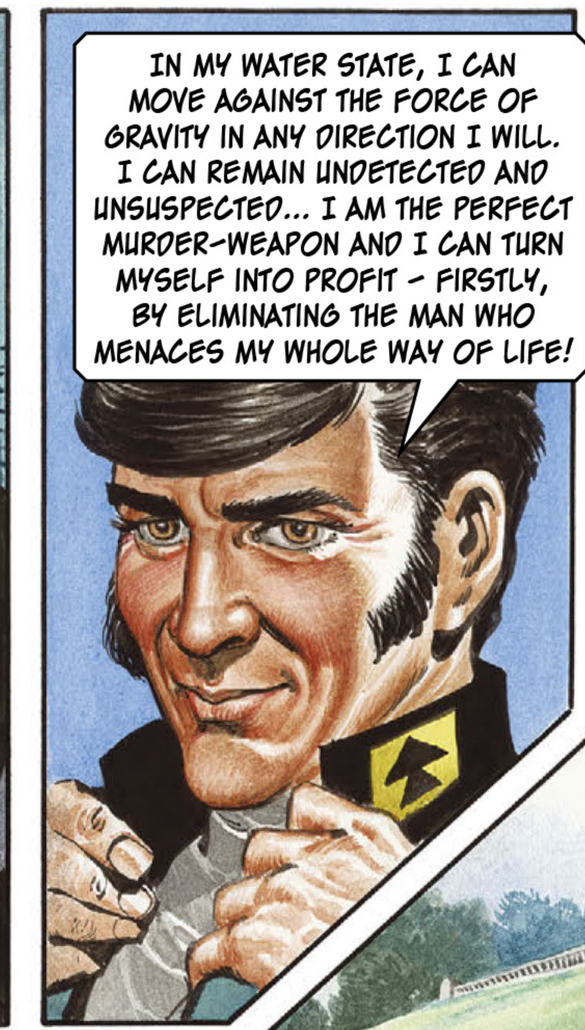
AND THEN...

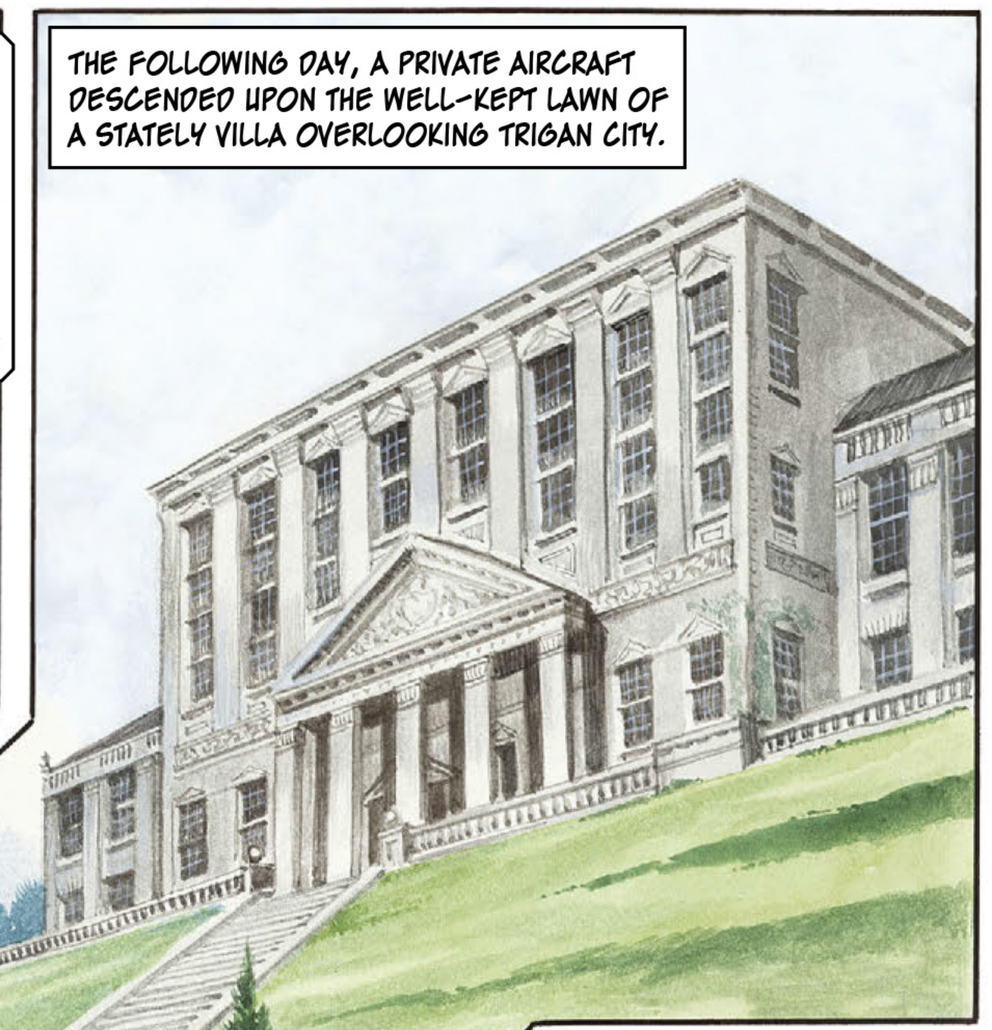
I AM NOW...

...RETURNING...

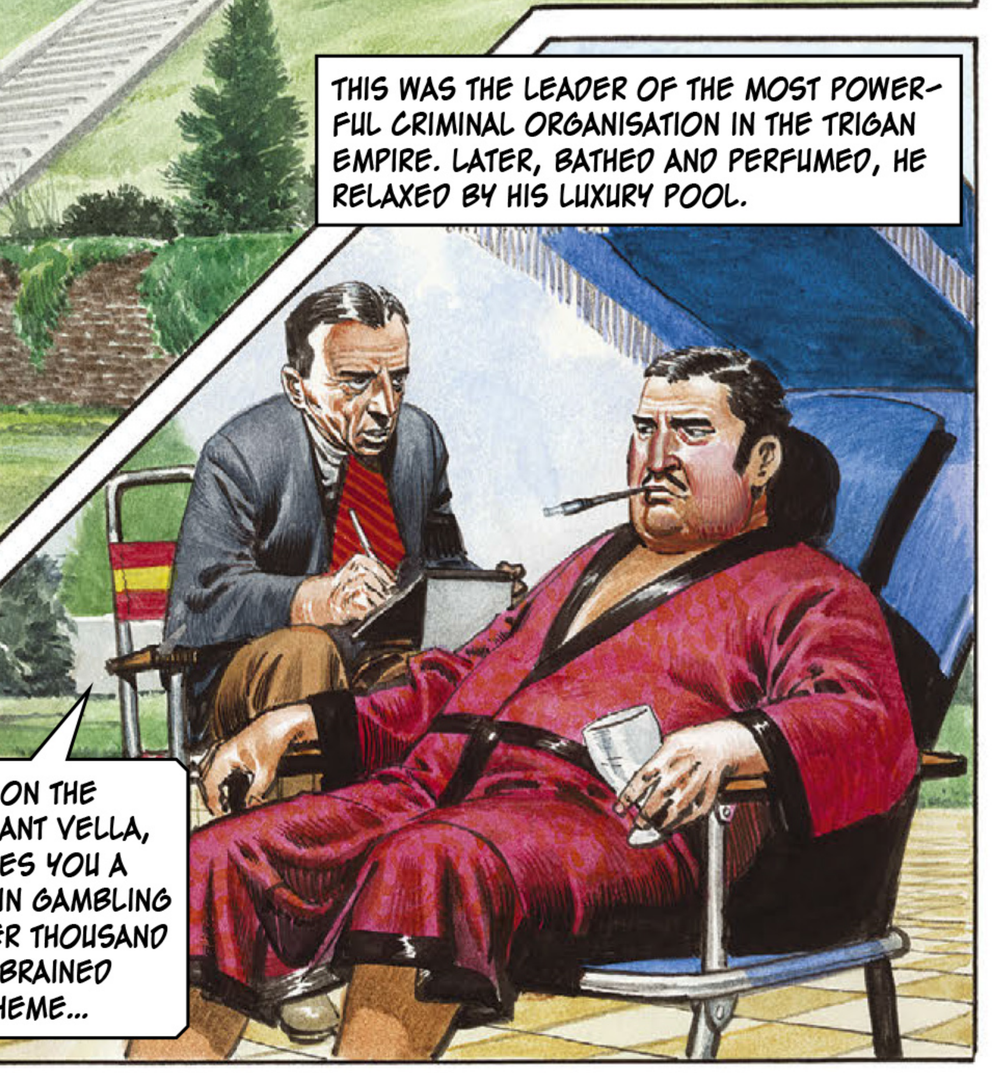
...TO NORMAL!

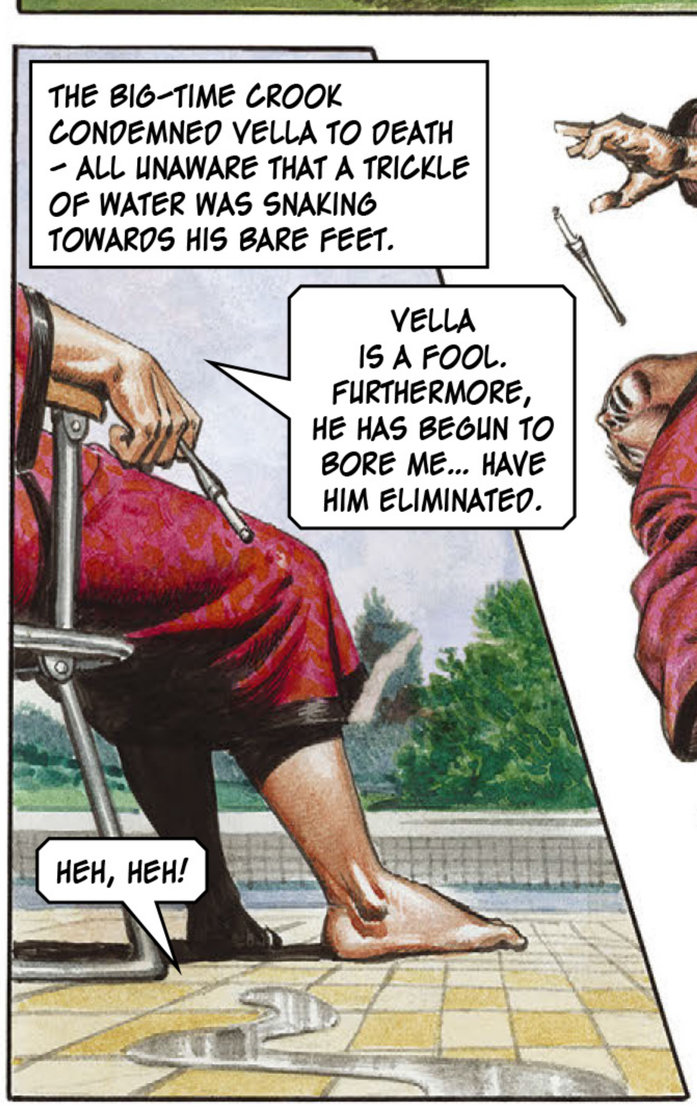

BEAMING WITH TRIUMPH, VELLA ENTHUSED TO HIS ACCOMPLICE.
THE WHOLE THING IS EVIL... DIABOLICAL!
RUBBISH! IT IS THE GREATEST MONEY-SPINNING IDEA OF THE CENTURY! FROM NOW ON, I CAN CHANGE MYSELF TO AN EQUAL VOLUME OF WATER AT WILL. ELECTRICALLY-CHARGED WATER WHICH - AS YOU SAW WITH THE NUROT - CAN KILL AT A TOUCH!


IN MY WATER STATE, I CAN MOVE AGAINST THE FORCE OF GRAVITY IN ANY DIRECTION I WILL. I CAN REMAIN UNDETECTED AND UNSUSPECTED... I AM THE PERFECT MURDER-WEAPON AND I CAN TURN MYSELF INTO PROFIT - FIRSTLY, BY ELIMINATING THE MAN WHO MENACES MY WHOLE WAY OF LIFE!


THE FOLLOWING DAY, A PRIVATE AIRCRAFT DESCENDED UPON THE WELL-KEPT LAWN OF A STATELY VILLA OVERLOOKING TRIGAN CITY.

WELCOME HOME, MASTER. I TRUST YOU HAVE HAD A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS TRIP?
SHUT YOUR MEALY MOUTH, SLAKKA! YOU KNOW VERY WELL THAT MY BUSINESS HAS BEEN THE BUSINESS OF ELIMINATING MY RIVALS IN BIG-TIME CRIME.

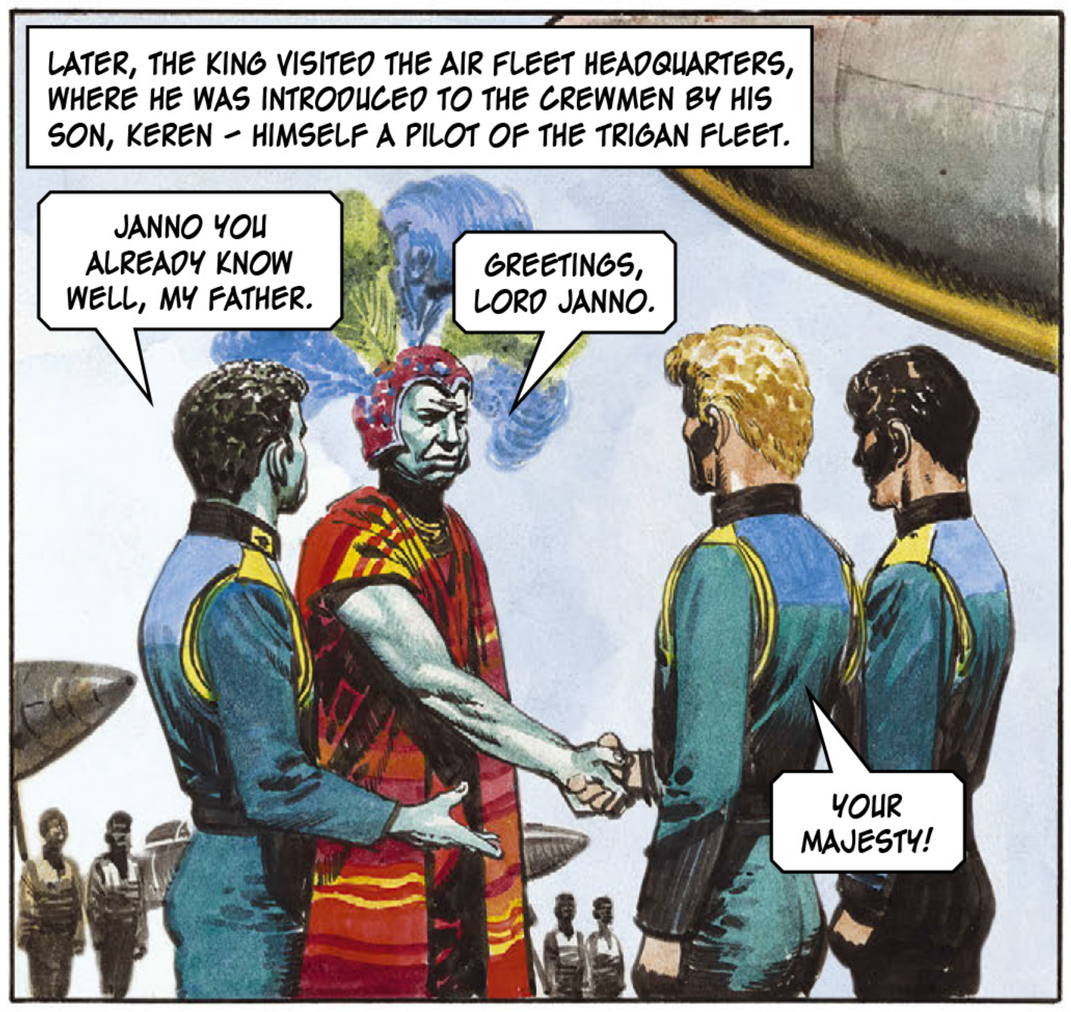

THIS WAS THE LEADER OF THE MOST POWERFUL CRIMINAL ORGANISATION IN THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. LATER, BATHED AND PERFUMED, HE RELAXED BY HIS LUXURY POOL.
ER... TOUCHING ON THE MATTER OF LIEUTENANT VELLA, MASTER, WHO OWES YOU A THOUSAND THULLARS IN GAMBLING DEBTS, PLUS ANOTHER THOUSAND FOR SOME HAREBRAINED SCIENTIFIC SCHEME...

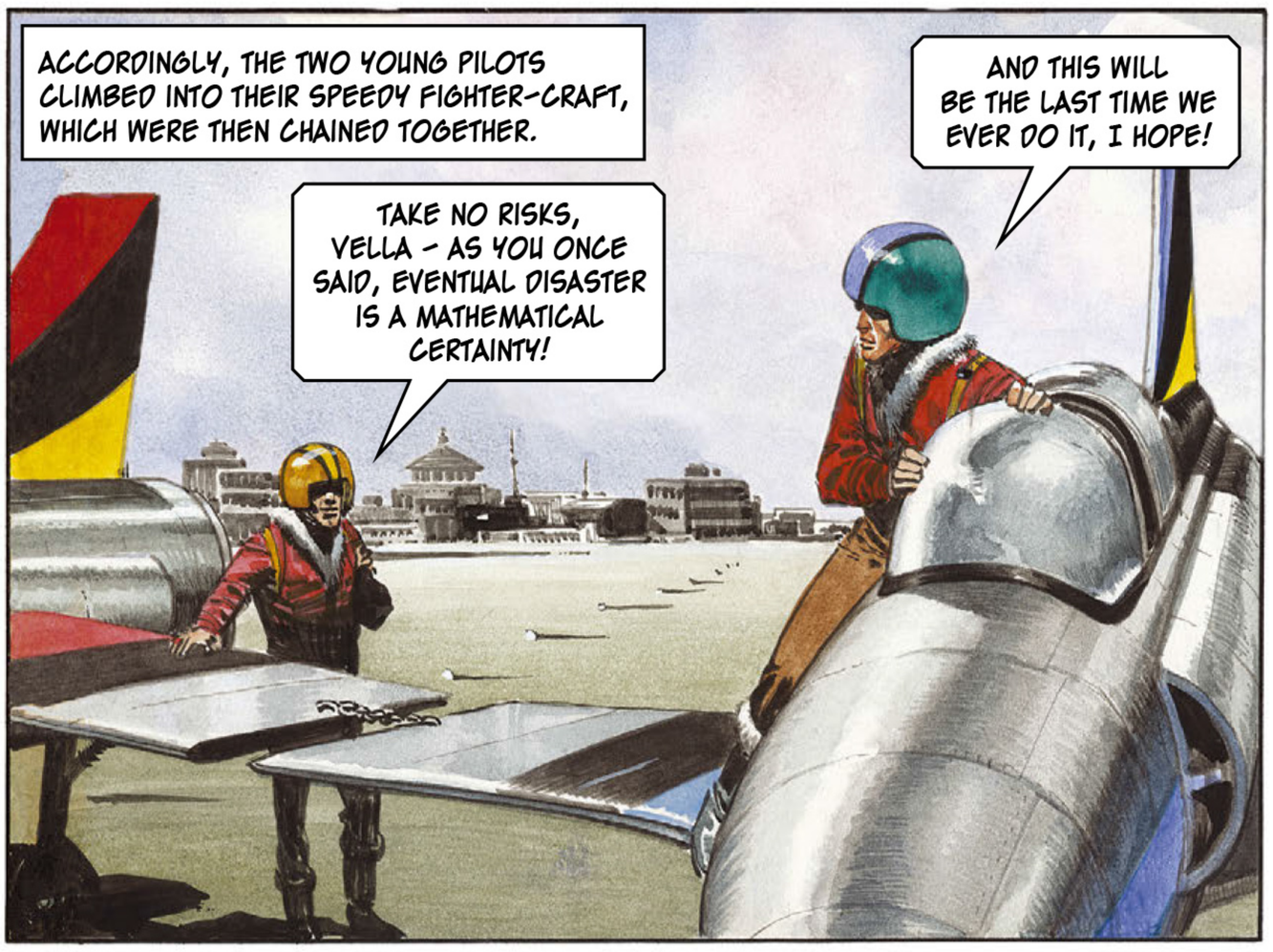

THE BIG-TIME CROOK CONDEMNED VELLA TO DEATH - ALL UNAWARE THAT A TRICKLE OF WATER WAS SNAKING TOWARDS HIS BARE FEET.
VELLA IS A FOOL. FURTHERMORE, HE HAS BEGUN TO BORE ME... HAVE HIM ELIMINATED.
HEH, HEH!

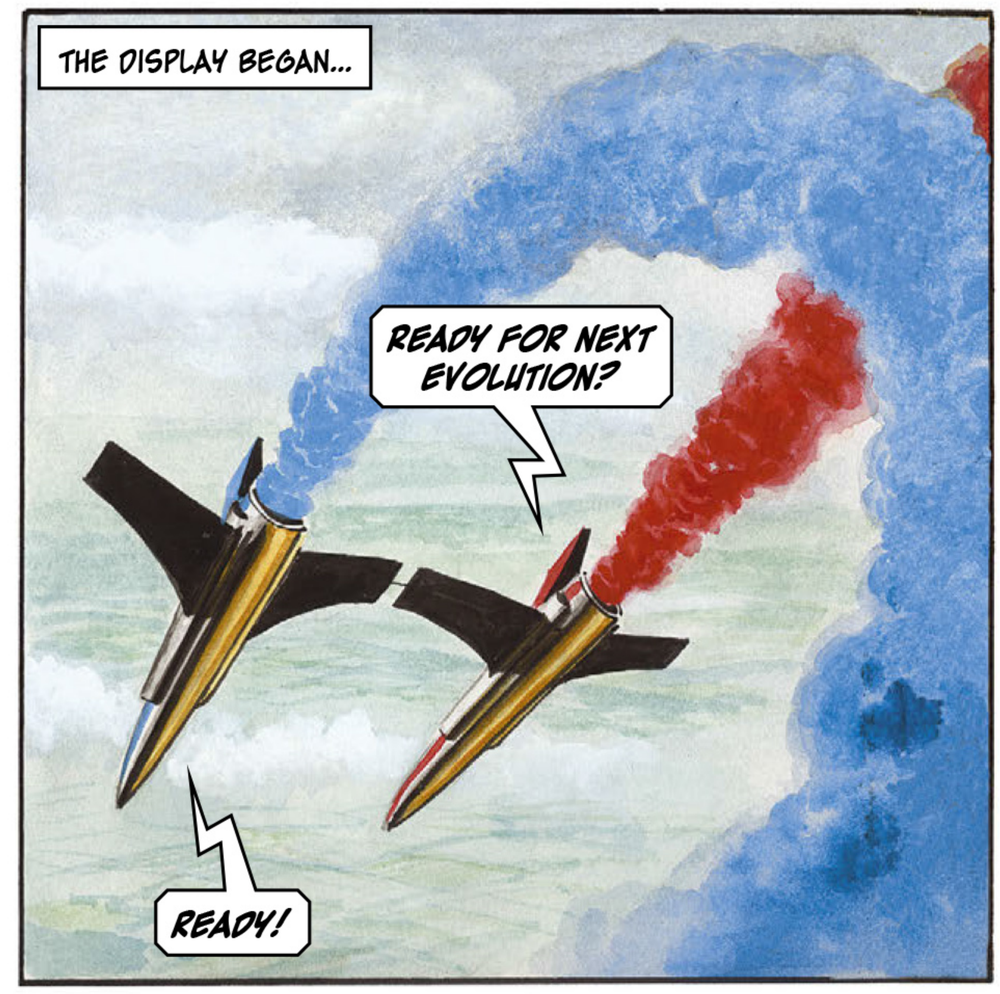
THE NEXT INSTANT...

THE WATER! IT'S SURROUNDING ME! IT'S GOING TO DESTROY ME... THE WAY IT DESTROYED MY MASTER!

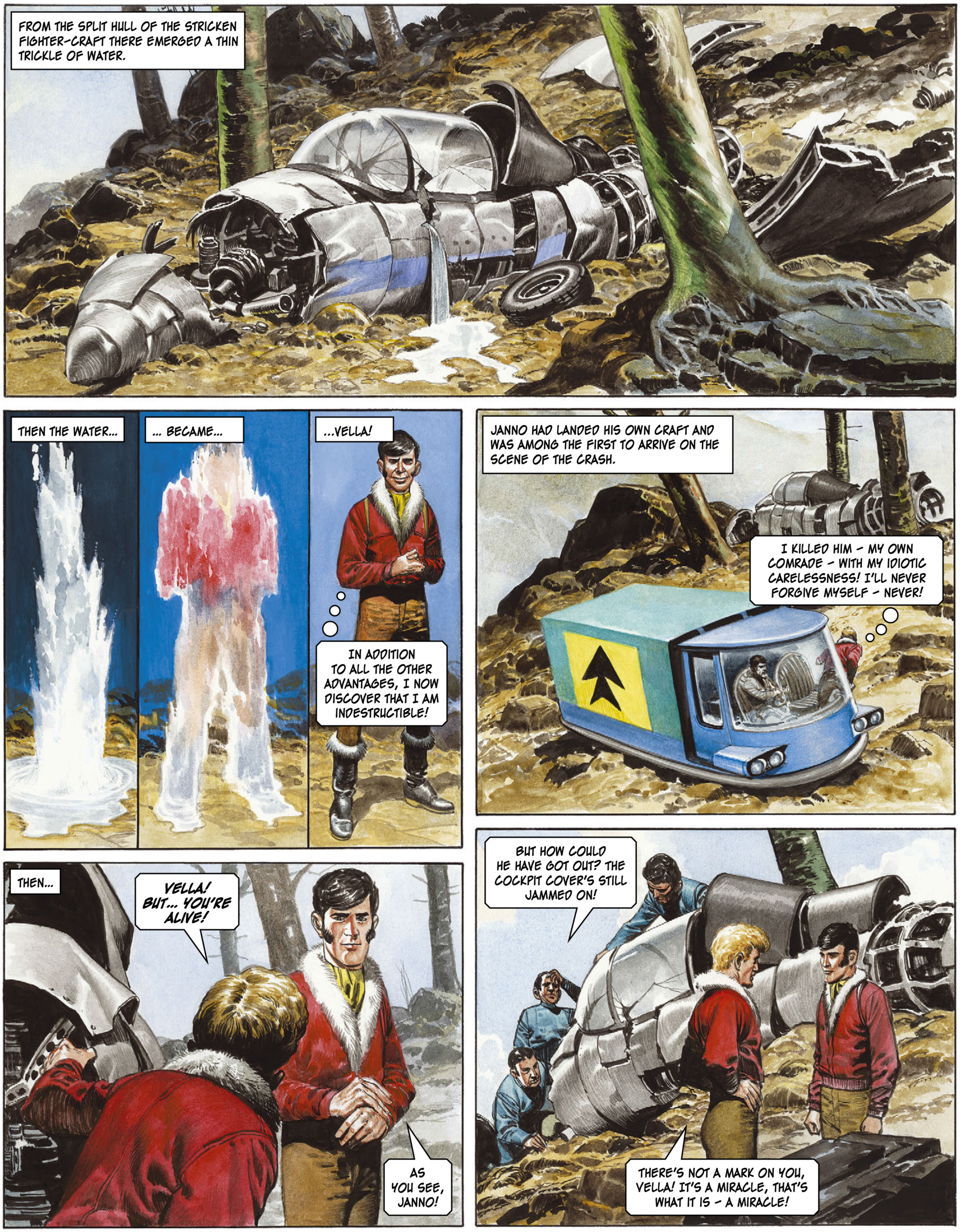
A FEW DAYS LATER, ALL TRIGAN CITY CROWDED THE STREETS FOR THE CEREMONIAL VISIT OF THE KING OF DAVELI.



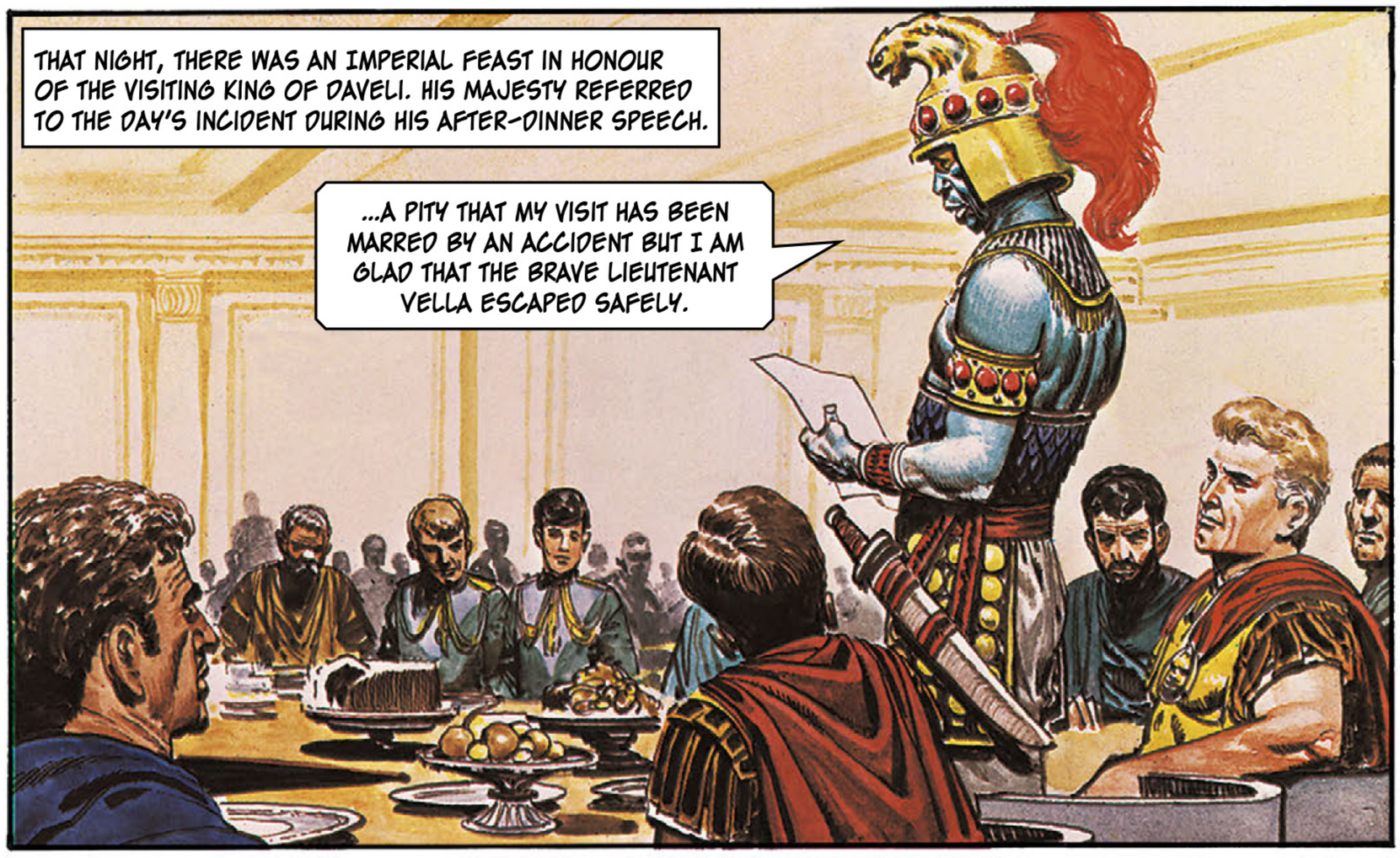




THE DEATH-DEFYING CLOSE AEROBATICS WERE CONTROLLED BY JANNO.
COMMENCE RIGHT HAND CLIMBING TURN... NOW!
COMMENCING!
AND THEN – JANNO GAVE AN UNCONTROLLABLE SNEEZE!
AAA-SHOOO!
DISASTER WAS IMMEDIATE AND FATAL! HIS WINGTIP SLICED INTO VELLA'S CRAFT!
AAARGH!
BUT THERE WAS NO ESCAPE, IT SEEMED, FOR VELLA!
THEN HE WAS WATCHING IN HORROR AS HIS COMRADE SPUN DOWN TO HIS CERTAIN DOOM!
EJECT, VELLA! GET OUT, MAN, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!
THE EJECTOR GEAR'S DAMAGED! I'M TRAPPED IN HERE!
WHAT DOES IT MATTER IF I AM? – HA! HA!
MOMENTS LATER, THE CRAFT PLOUGHED INTO A HILLSIDE!


FROM THE SPLIT HULL OF THE STRICKEN FIGHTER-CRAFT THERE EMERGED A THIN TRICKLE OF WATER.
THEN THE WATER...
... BECAME...
...VELLA!
IN ADDITION TO ALL THE OTHER ADVANTAGES, I NOW DISCOVER THAT I AM INDESTRUCTIBLE!
JANNO HAD LANDED HIS OWN CRAFT AND WAS AMONG THE FIRST TO ARRIVE ON THE SCENE OF THE CRASH.
I KILLED HIM – MY OWN COMRADE – WITH MY IDIOTIC CARELESSNESS! I'LL NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF – NEVER!
THEN...
VELLA! BUT... YOU'RE ALIVE!
AS YOU SEE, JANNO!
BUT HOW COULD HE HAVE GOT OUT? THE COCKPIT COVER'S STILL JAMMED ON!
THERE'S NOT A MARK ON YOU, VELLA! IT'S A MIRACLE, THAT'S WHAT IT IS – A MIRACLE!

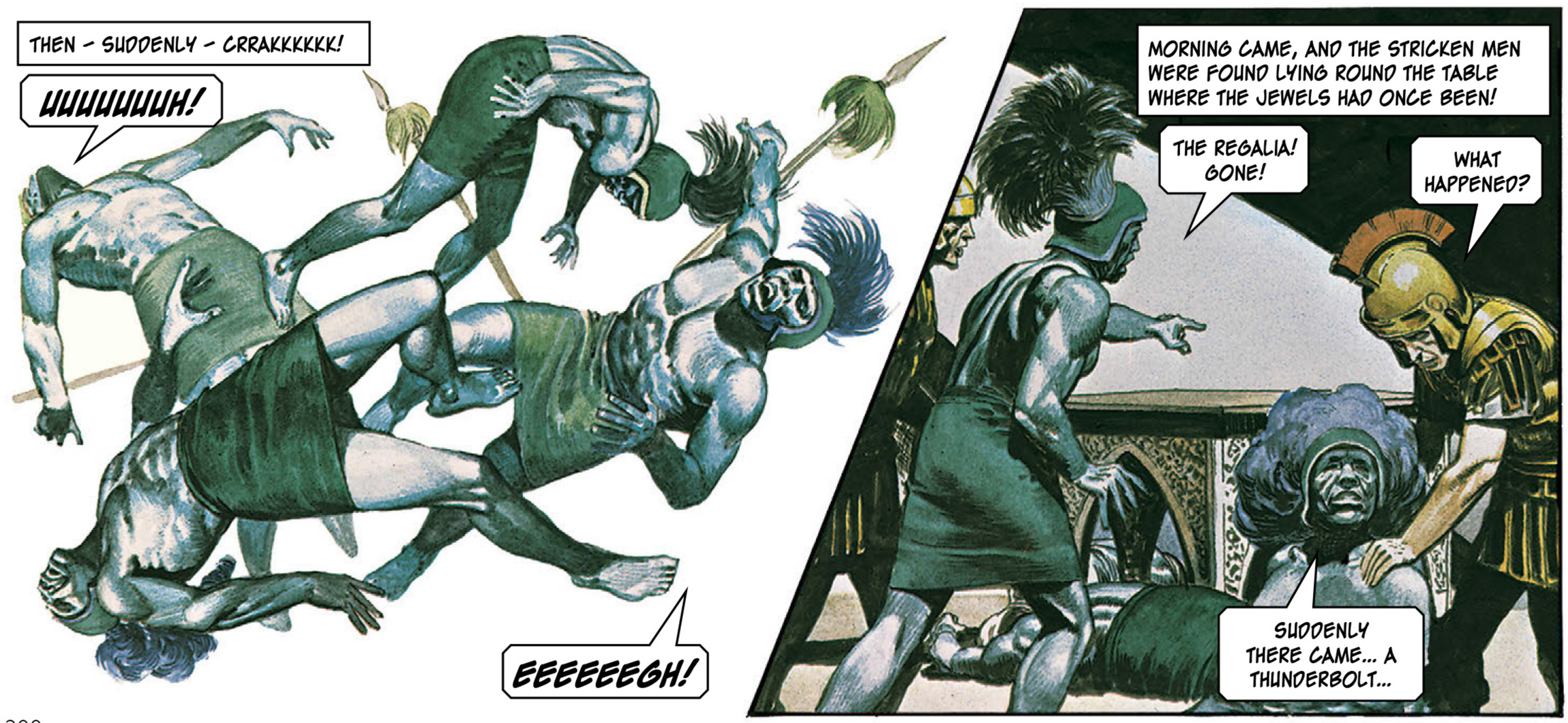
I HOPE YOU GO ON BELIEVING IT WAS A MIRACLE, YOU SUPERSTITIOUS FOOL! FOR MY PART, I WOULD FEEL HAPPIER IF I'D THOUGHT TO AT LEAST RUFFLE MY HAIR AND RUB A BIT OF DIRT ON MY CHEEK!

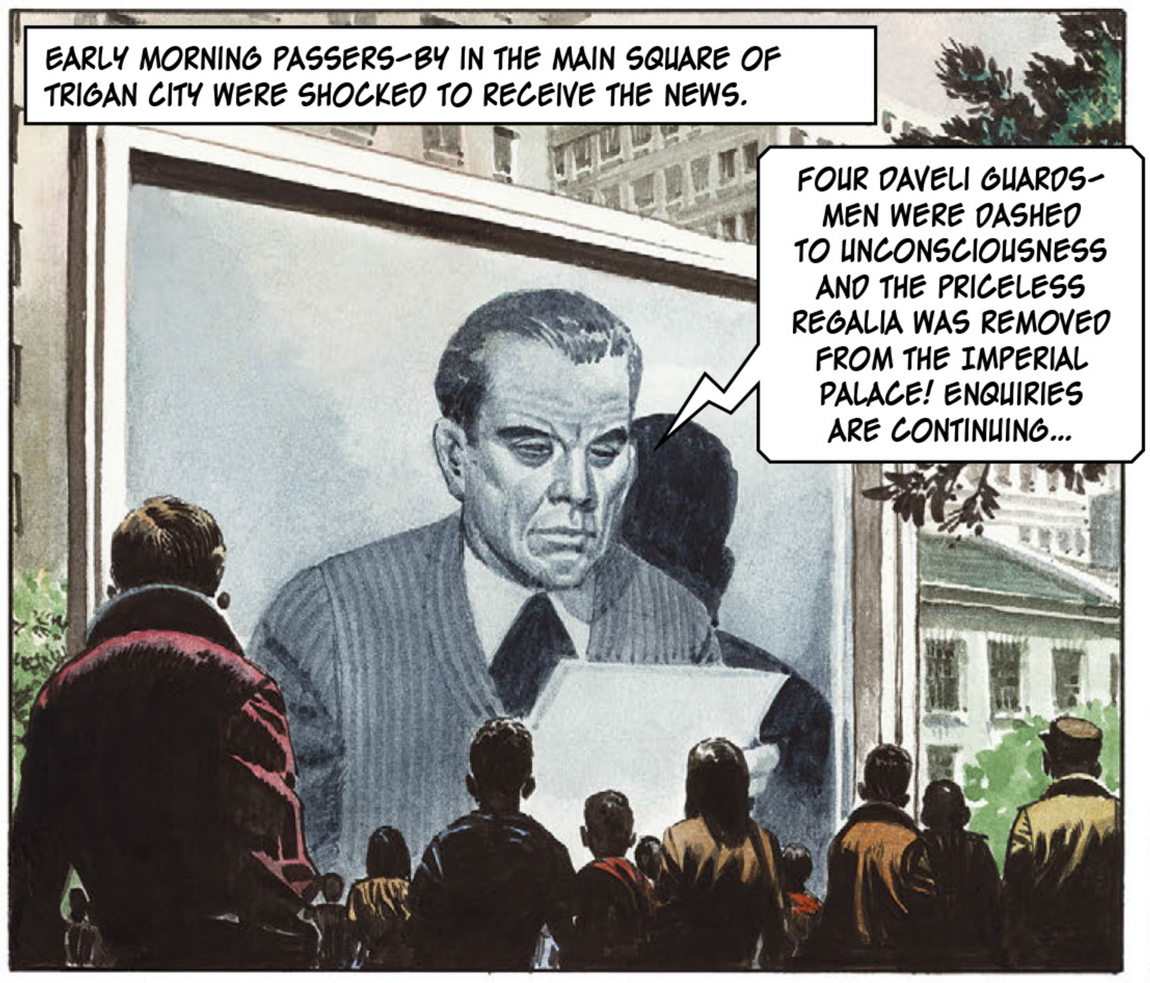

THAT NIGHT, THERE WAS AN IMPERIAL FEAST IN HONOUR OF THE VISITING KING OF DAVELI. HIS MAJESTY REFERRED TO THE DAY'S INCIDENT DURING HIS AFTER-DINNER SPEECH.
...A PITY THAT MY VISIT HAS BEEN MARRED BY AN ACCIDENT BUT I AM GLAD THAT THE BRAVE LIEUTENANT VELLA ESCAPED SAFELY.

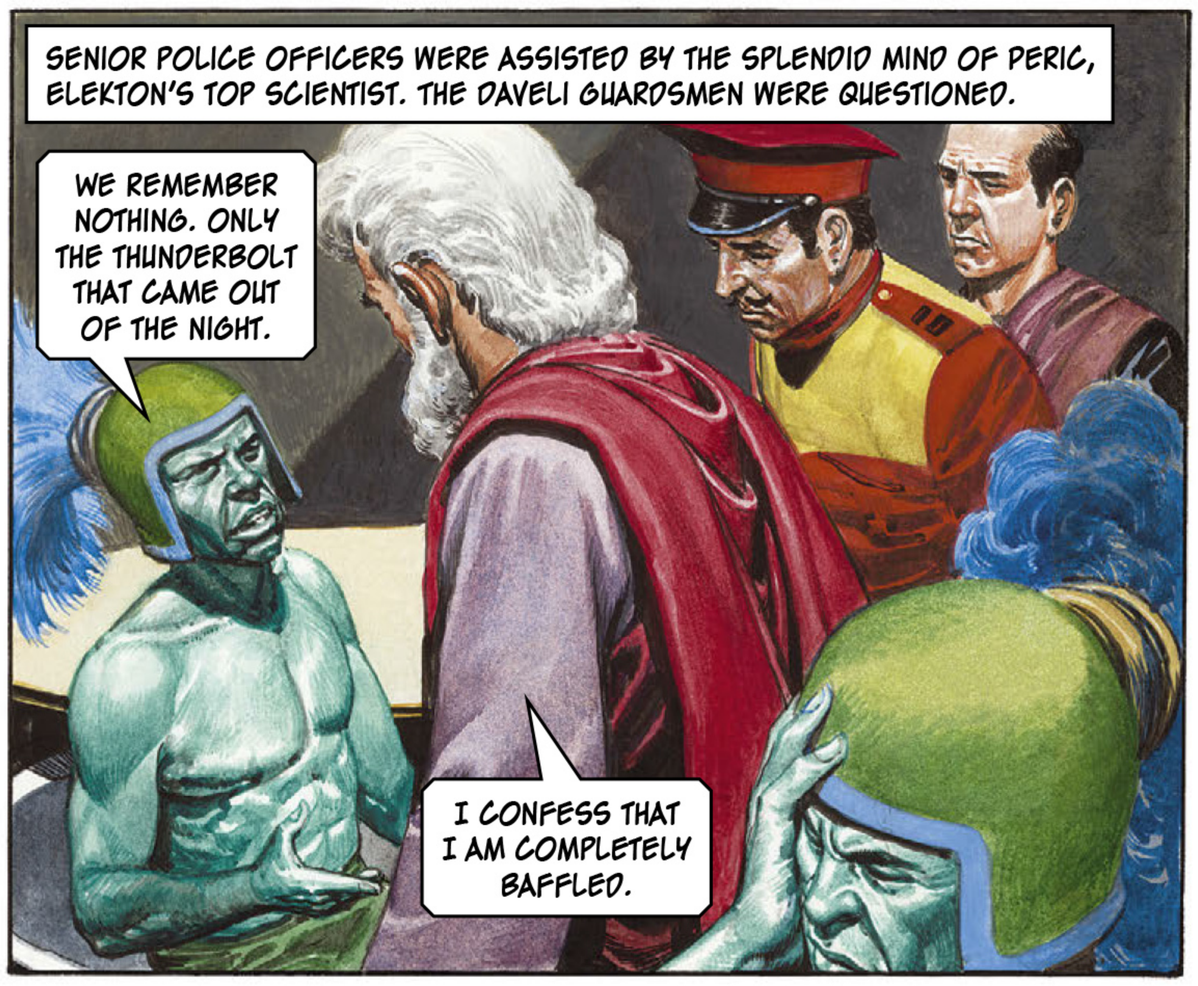
VELLA ONLY HAD EYES FOR THE KING'S GLITTERING REGALIA.
I'LL HAVE YOUR JEWELS TONIGHT, YOU BARBARIC BRUTE! AFTER ALL, IT WAS ONLY TO ENTERTAIN YOU THAT I NEARLY GOT MYSELF KILLED TODAY!

THAT NIGHT, THE CROWN JEWELS OF DAVELI WERE WATCHED OVER BY FOUR UNSLEEPING GUARDSMEN OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD TROOPS.

THE THIN TRICKLE OF WATER THAT CAME TOWARDS THEM WENT UNNOTICED.


THEN - SUDDENLY - CRRAKKKKKK!
UUUUUUUH!
EEEEEEGH!
MORNING CAME, AND THE STRICKEN MEN WERE FOUND LYING ROUND THE TABLE WHERE THE JEWELS HAD ONCE BEEN!
THE REGALIA! GONE!
WHAT HAPPENED?
SUDDENLY THERE CAME... A THUNDERBOLT...

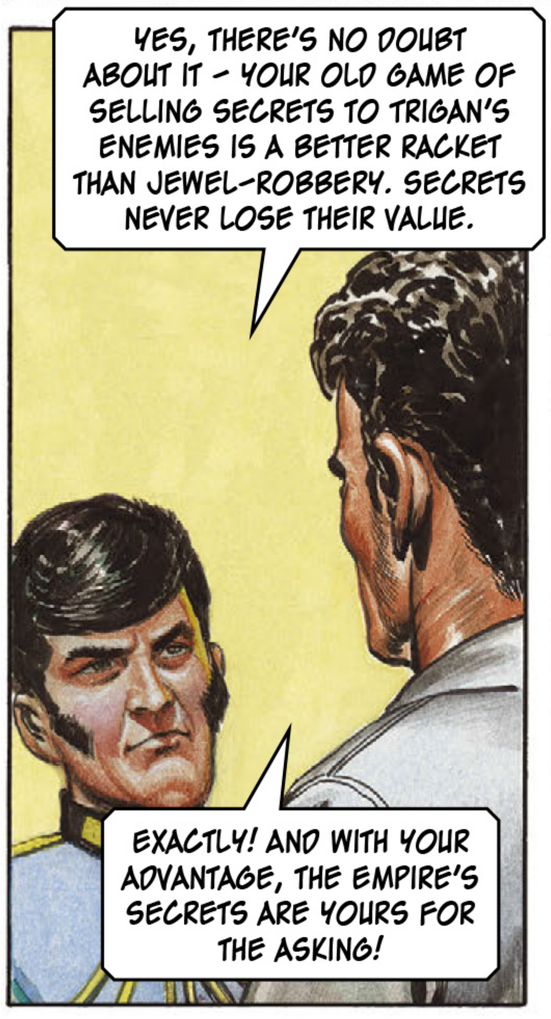

EARLY MORNING PASSERS-BY IN THE MAIN SQUARE OF TRIGAN CITY WERE SHOCKED TO RECEIVE THE NEWS.
FOUR DAVELI GUARDSMEN WERE DASHED TO UNCONSCIOUSNESS AND THE PRICELESS REGALIA WAS REMOVED FROM THE IMPERIAL PALACE! ENQUIRIES ARE CONTINUING...

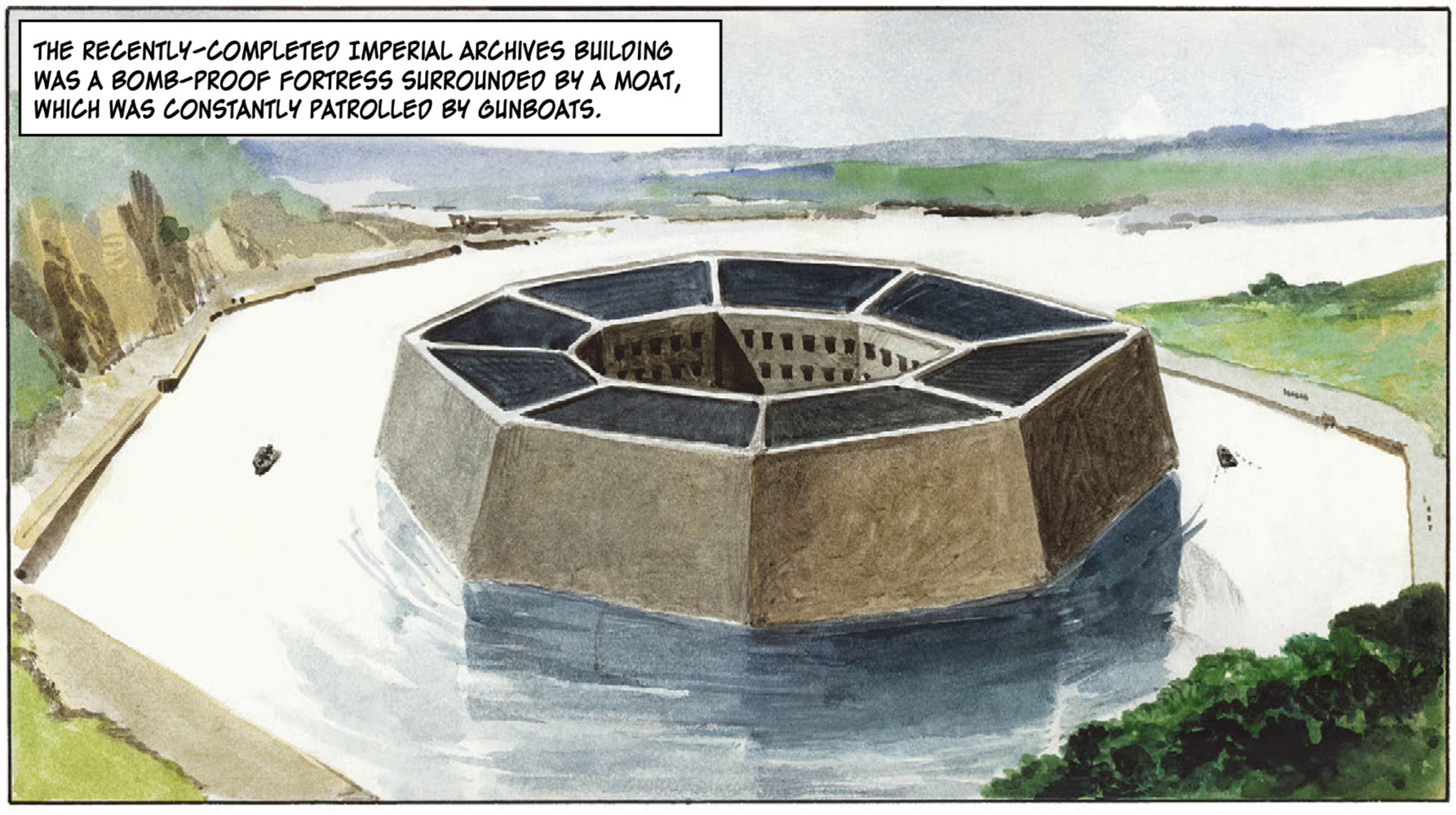

SENIOR POLICE OFFICERS WERE ASSISTED BY THE SPLENDID MIND OF PERIC, ELEKTON'S TOP SCIENTIST. THE DAVELI GUARDSMEN WERE QUESTIONED.
WE REMEMBER NOTHING. ONLY THE THUNDERBOLT THAT CAME OUT OF THE NIGHT.
I CONFESS THAT I AM COMPLETELY BAFFLED.

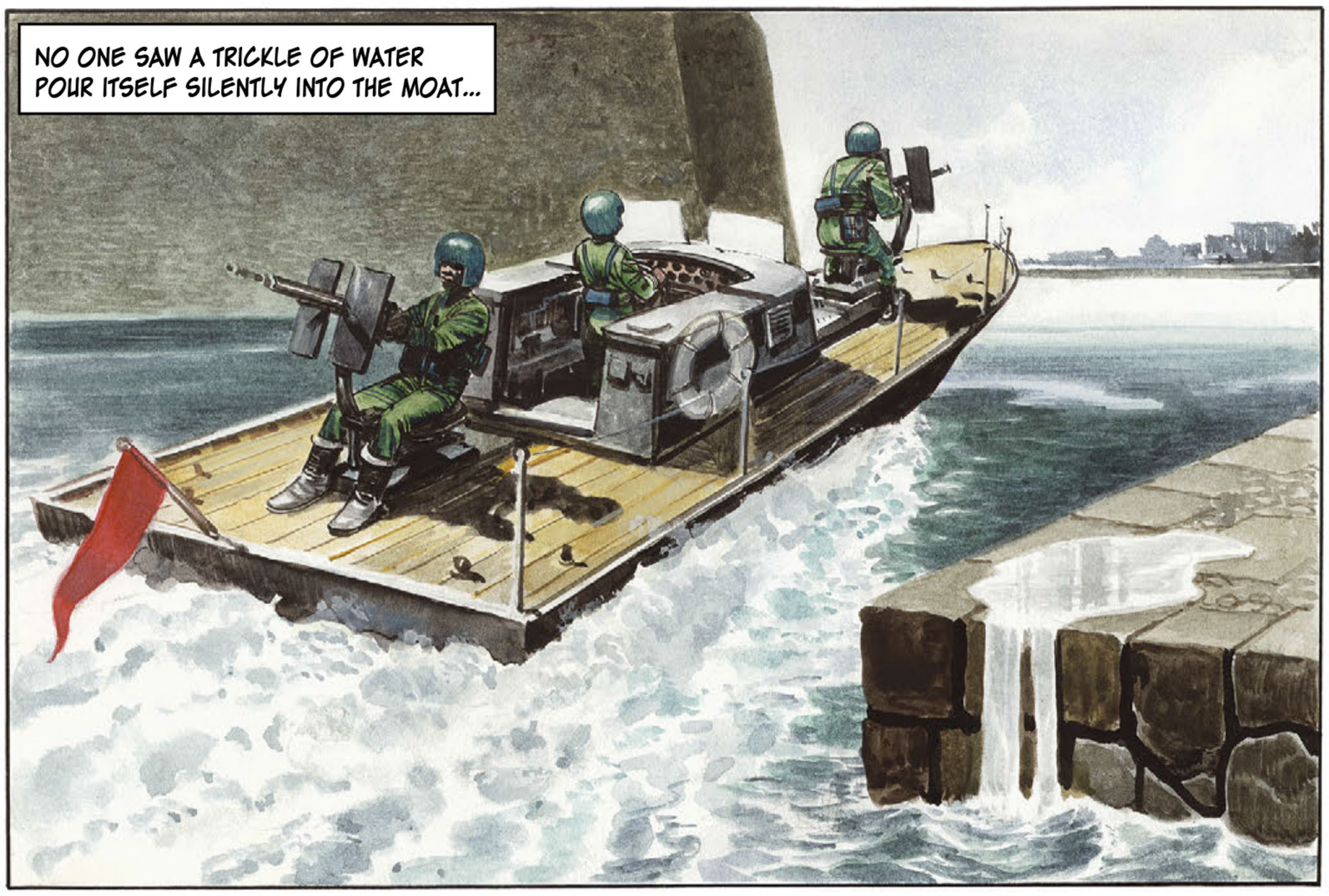
PERIC LEFT THE PALACE WITH HIS YOUNG FRIEND JANNO.
HOW IS YOUR COMRADE VELLA AFTER HIS LUCKY ESCAPE?
IT WAS NOT LUCK THAT SAVED HIM, PERIC. IT WAS A MIRACLE!

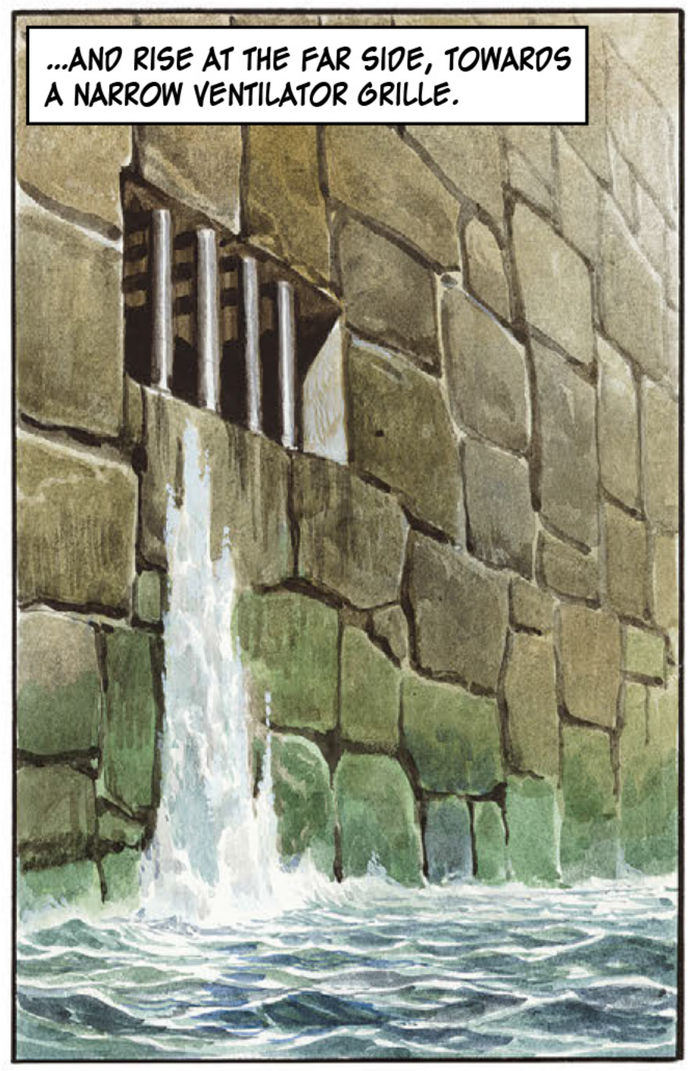
LET ME TELL YOU, JANNO, THAT THERE ARE NO SUCH THINGS AS MIRACLES. EVERY PHENOMENON HAS A LOGICAL SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION... EVEN THUNDERBOLTS THAT COME OUT OF THE NIGHT!

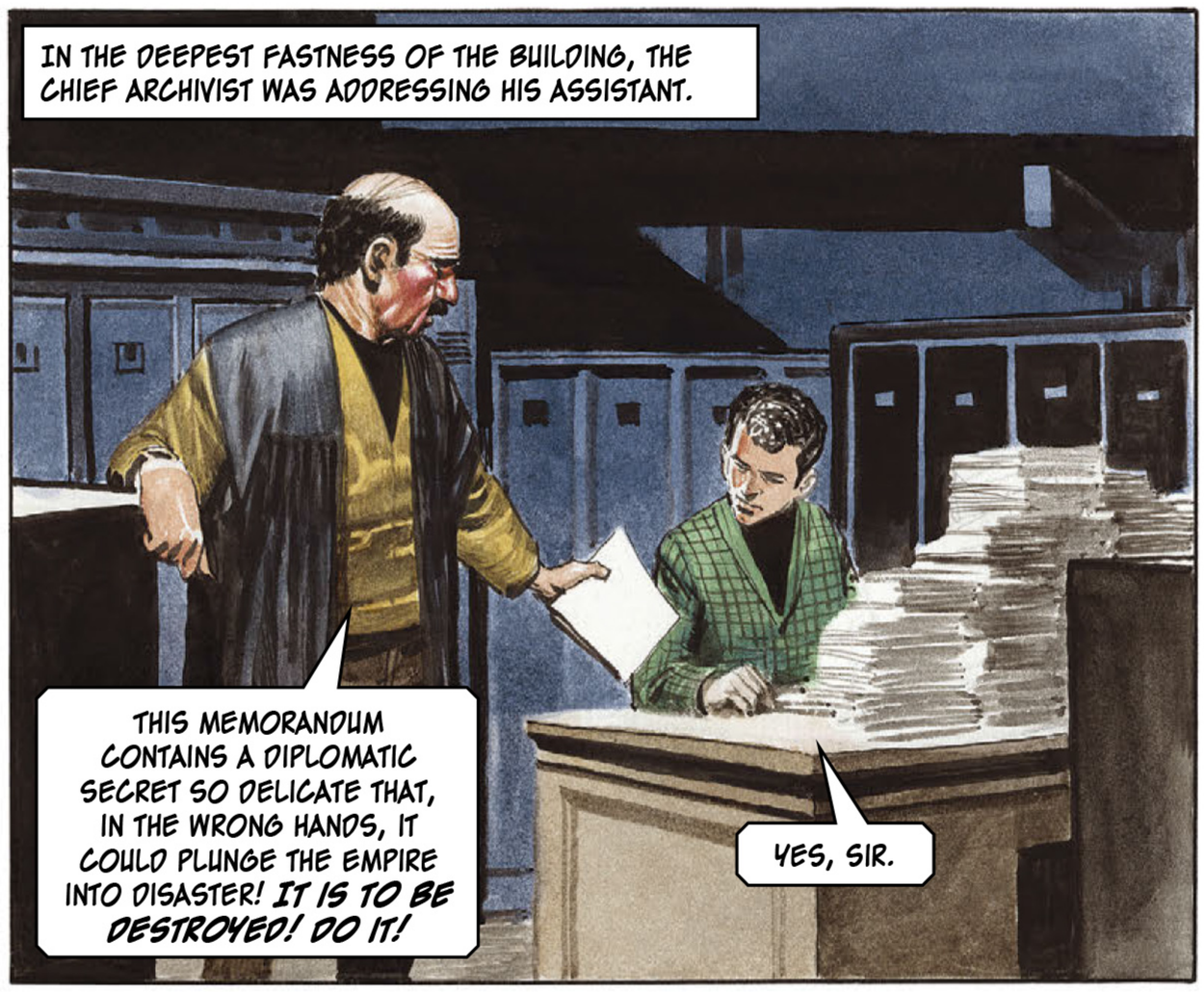
MEANWHILE, BACK IN HIS APARTMENT, VELLA WAS DISPLAYING HIS LOOT TO HIS ACCOMPLICE.
THEY'RE PRICELESS RIGHT ENOUGH – BUT THAT ALSO MEANS THAT NO ONE WILL BUY THEM, SINCE THEY'LL BE INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE.
QUITE SO. BUT I SHALL BREAK THEM UP – THUS – AND MAKE WHAT MONEY I CAN WITH THE BITS AND PIECES.


YES, THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT – YOUR OLD GAME OF SELLING SECRETS TO TRIGAN'S ENEMIES IS A BETTER RACKET THAN JEWEL-ROBBERY. SECRETS NEVER LOSE THEIR VALUE.
EXACTLY! AND WITH YOUR ADVANTAGE, THE EMPIRE'S SECRETS ARE YOURS FOR THE ASKING!

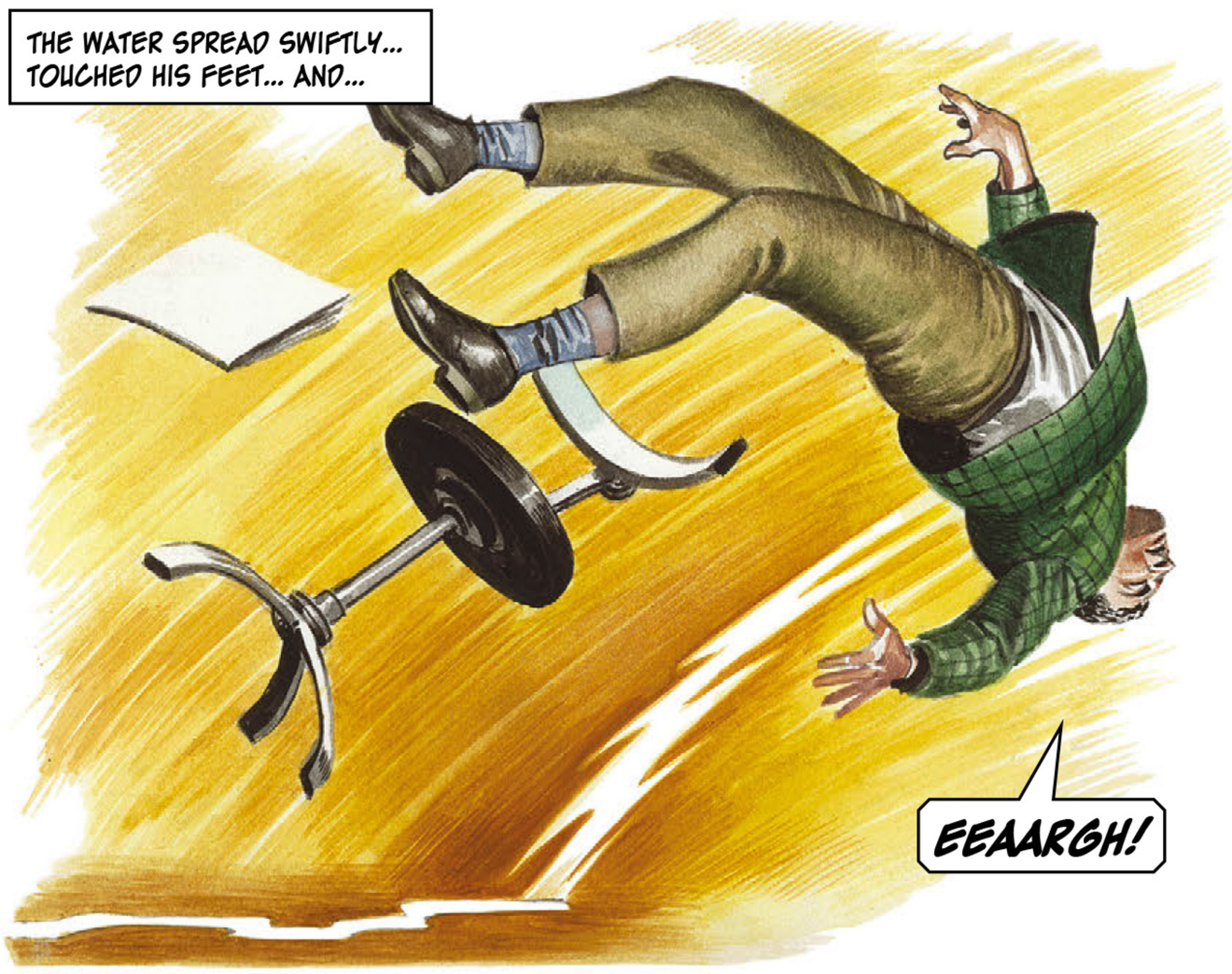

THE RECENTLY-COMPLETED IMPERIAL ARCHIVES BUILDING WAS A BOMB-PROOF FORTRESS SURROUNDED BY A MOAT, WHICH WAS CONSTANTLY PATROLLED BY GUNBOATS.

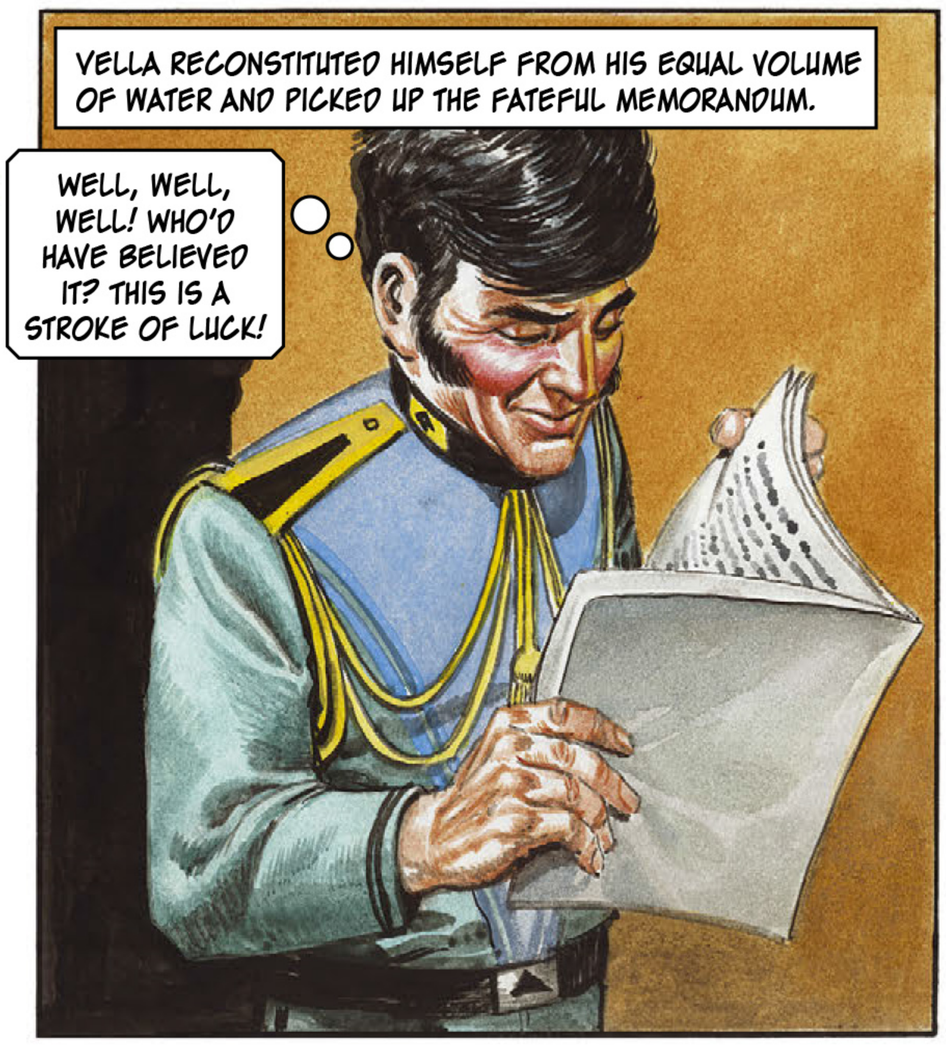

NO ONE SAW A TRICKLE OF WATER POUR ITSELF SILENTLY INTO THE MOAT...

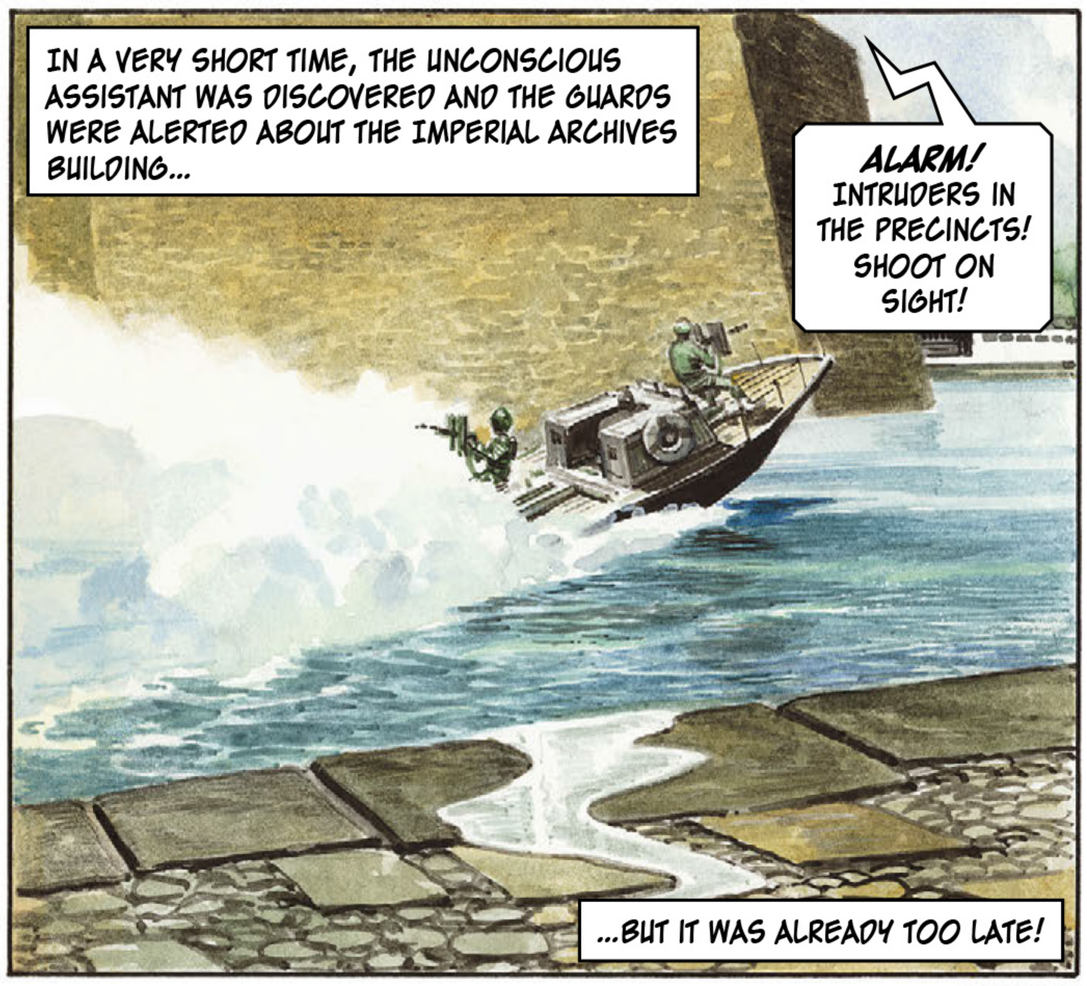

...AND RISE AT THE FAR SIDE, TOWARDS A NARROW VENTILATOR GRILLE.


IN THE DEEPEST FASTNESS OF THE BUILDING, THE CHIEF ARCHIVIST WAS ADDRESSING HIS ASSISTANT.
THIS MEMORANDUM CONTAINS A DIPLOMATIC SECRET SO DELICATE THAT, IN THE WRONG HANDS, IT COULD PLUNGE THE EMPIRE INTO DISASTER! IT IS TO BE DESTROYED! DO IT!
YES, SIR.

MOMENTS LATER, WHEN THE ASSISTANT WAS ALONE...
BY ALL THE STARS! IS THAT RAINWATER, LEAKING IN THROUGH THE AIR-CONDITIONING?

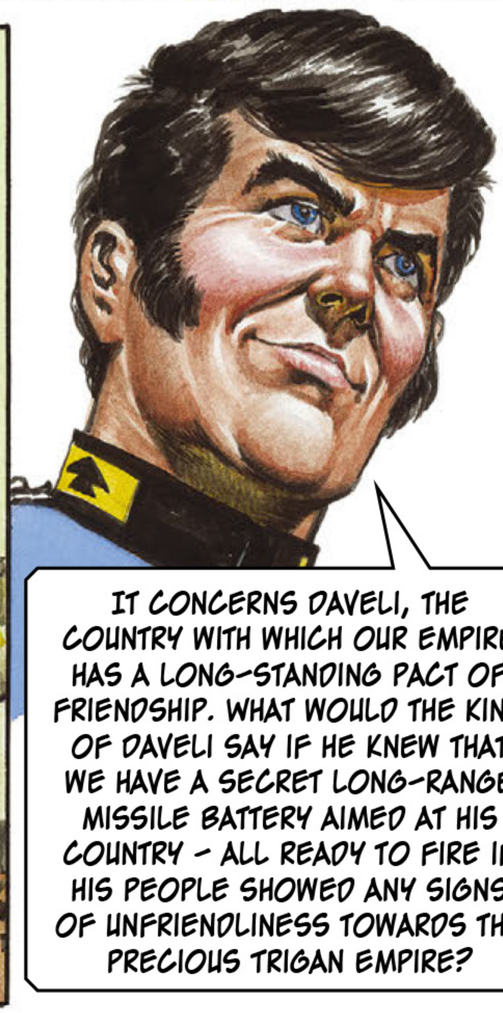

THE WATER SPREAD SWIFTLY... TOUCHED HIS FEET... AND...
EEAARGH!


VELLA RECONSTITUTED HIMSELF FROM HIS EQUAL VOLUME OF WATER AND PICKED UP THE FATEFUL MEMORANDUM.
WELL, WELL, WELL! WHO'D HAVE BELIEVED IT? THIS IS A STROKE OF LUCK!


IN A VERY SHORT TIME, THE UNCONSCIOUS ASSISTANT WAS DISCOVERED AND THE GUARDS WERE ALERTED ABOUT THE IMPERIAL ARCHIVES BUILDING...
ALARM! INTRUDERS IN THE PRECINCTS! SHOOT ON SIGHT!
...BUT IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE!

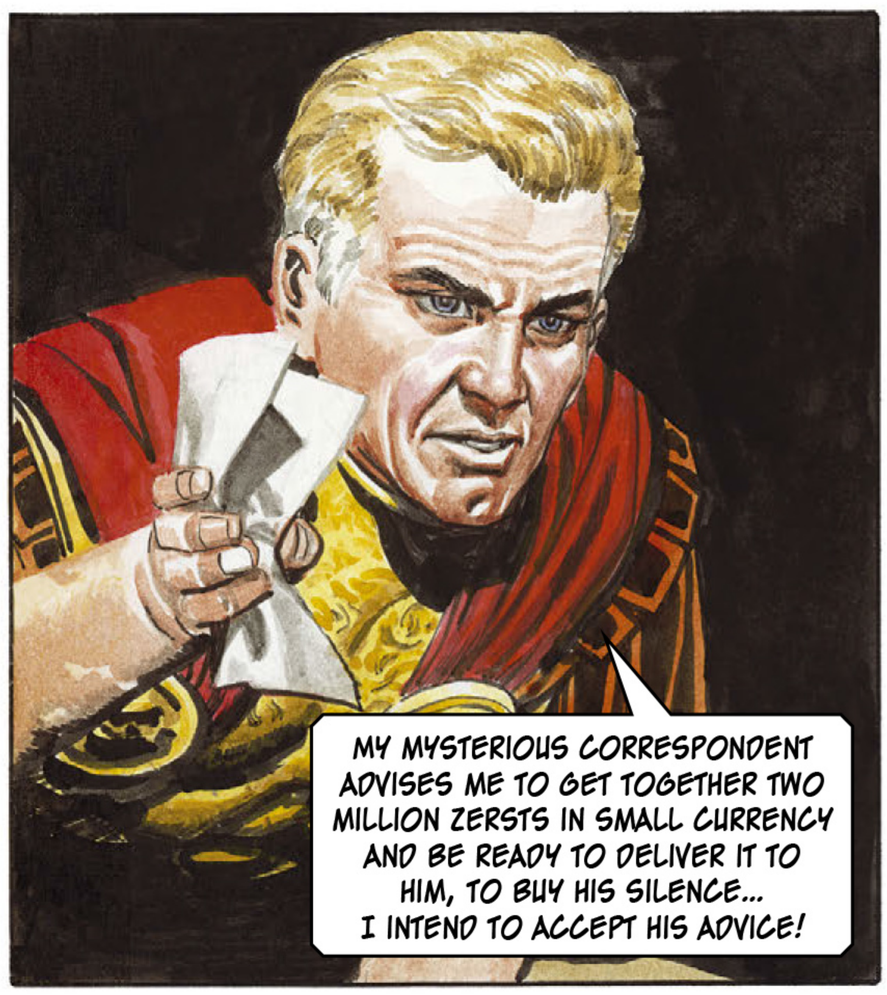
SOME DISTANCE AWAY, A TRICKLE OF WATER...
...BECAME...
...VELLA!
CRIME MADE EASY! HA, HA!

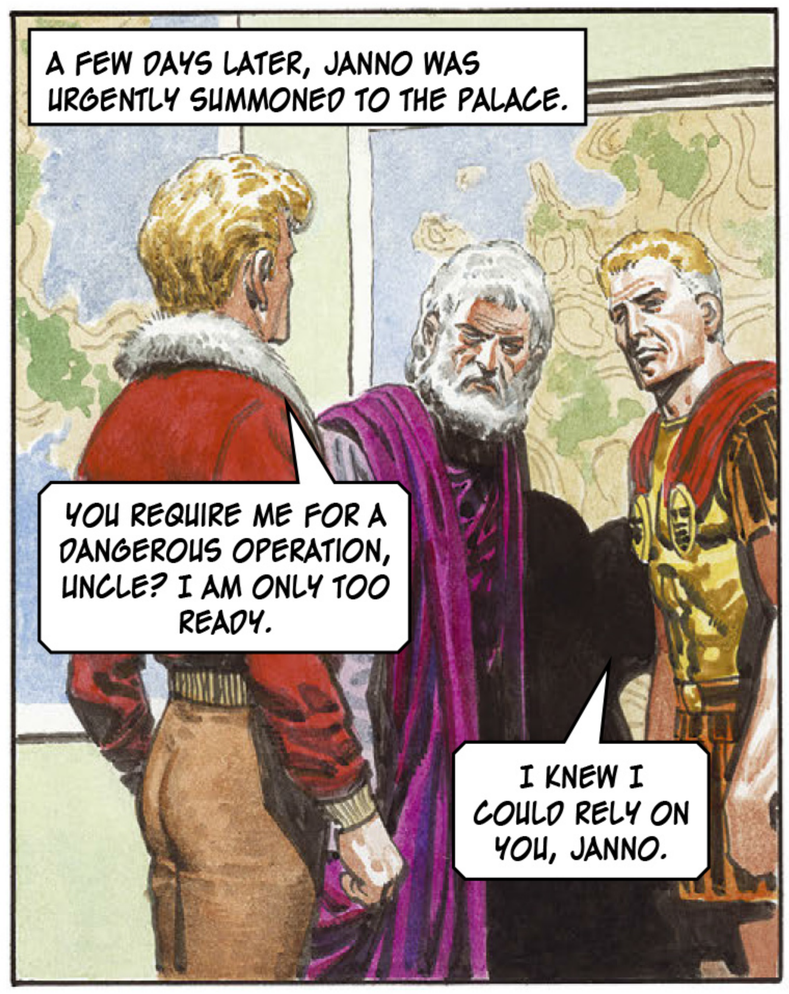
BACK AT HIS APARTMENT, VELLA WAS GREETED BY HIS ACCOMPLICE.
WELL, I SEE FROM YOUR EXPRESSION THAT THE OPERATION WAS SUCCESSFUL. WHAT DID YOU FIND?
A DIPLOMATIC SECRET, MY FRIEND – A SECRET SO HOT THAT OUR ESTEEMED EMPEROR WILL GIVE HIS PRIVATE FORTUNE TO KEEP ME FROM SHOUTING IT FROM THE ROOFTOPS!


IT CONCERNS DAVELI, THE COUNTRY WITH WHICH OUR EMPIRE HAS A LONG-STANDING PACT OF FRIENDSHIP. WHAT WOULD THE KING OF DAVELI SAY IF HE KNEW THAT WE HAVE A SECRET LONG-RANGE MISSILE BATTERY AIMED AT HIS COUNTRY – ALL READY TO FIRE IF HIS PEOPLE SHOWED ANY SIGNS OF UNFRIENDLINESS TOWARDS THE PRECIOUS TRIGAN EMPIRE?

THAT SAME DAY, A MESSAGE FOUND ITS WAY TO THE EMPEROR.
BY ALL THE STARS! OH, NO – NOT THIS!
WHAT IS IT, IMPERIAL MAJESTY?

AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL WAS CALLED.
GENTLEMEN, THERE IS NO NEED TO GO INTO OUR REASONS FOR THE SECRET MISSILE BATTERY. SUFFICIENT TO SAY THAT, IF DAVELI HEARS ABOUT IT, OUR VALUABLE FRIENDSHIP IS AT AN END!
THEN WHAT DOES YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY PROPOSE TO DO?


MY MYSTERIOUS CORRESPONDENT ADVISES ME TO GET TOGETHER TWO MILLION ZERSTS IN SMALL CURRENCY AND BE READY TO DELIVER IT TO HIM, TO BUY HIS SILENCE... I INTEND TO ACCEPT HIS ADVICE!


A FEW DAYS LATER, JANNO WAS URGENTLY SUMMONED TO THE PALACE.
YOU REQUIRE ME FOR A DANGEROUS OPERATION, UNCLE? I AM ONLY TOO READY.
I KNEW I COULD RELY ON YOU, JANNO.

FOR REASONS I CANNOT REVEAL TO YOU, I MUST FLY TO THE HEART OF THE VORG WILDERNESS AND DEPOSIT A LARGE SUM OF MONEY. I AM SUPPOSED TO TRAVEL ALONE – BUT YOU WILL BE A SECRET PASSENGER!

LATER THAT DAY, THEY WERE HOVERING OVER THE DESERTED WILDERNESS.

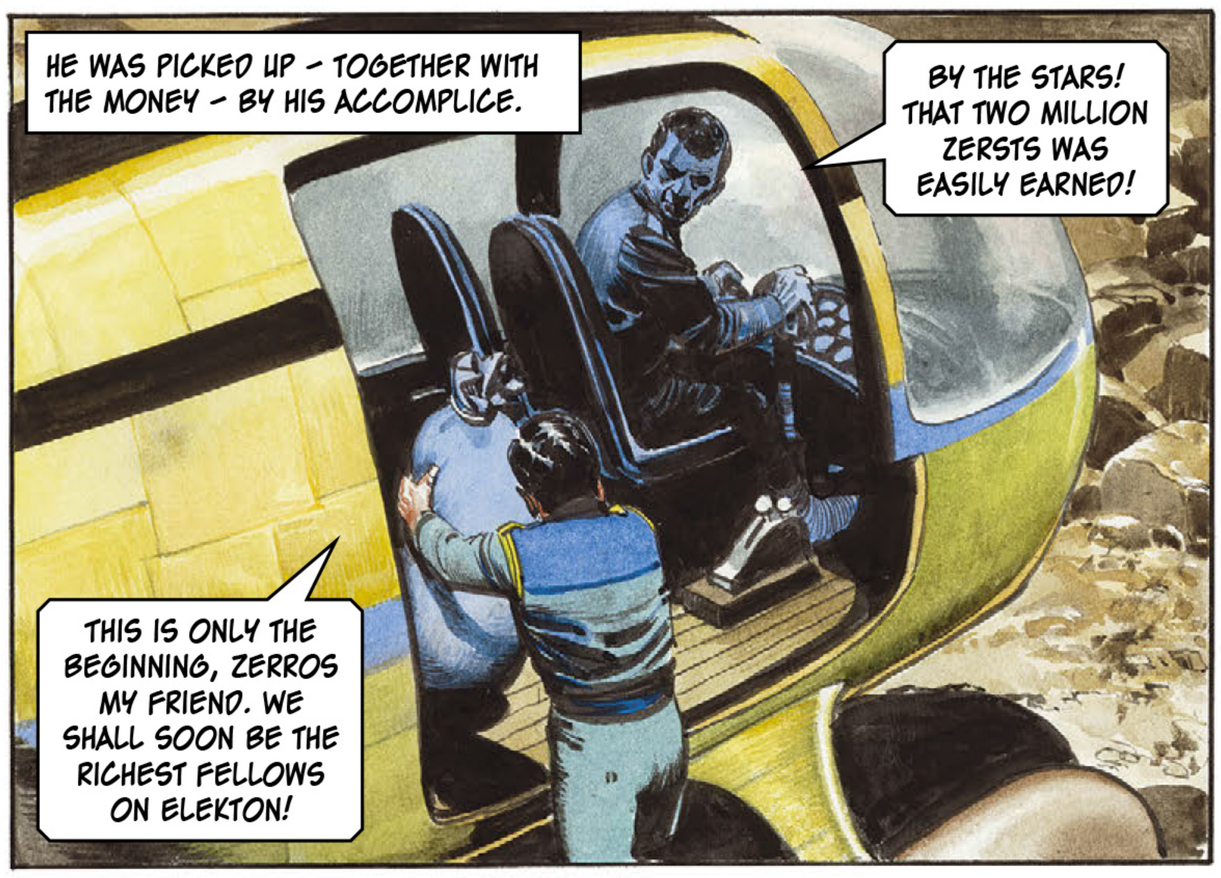
ARE WE THERE, UNCLE?

YES, JANNO, WE'RE RIGHT ABOVE THE SPOT NOW. AS SOON AS I LAND, YOU TAKE COVER BEHIND THE ROCKS.

NO ONE IN SIGHT. YOU KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO. GOOD LUCK.

THE WATER EBBED TOWARDS JANNO. THEN – KRAKKK! HE WAS FLUNG INTO THE AIR BY A STUNNING ELECTRICAL CHARGE!
EEAAGH!

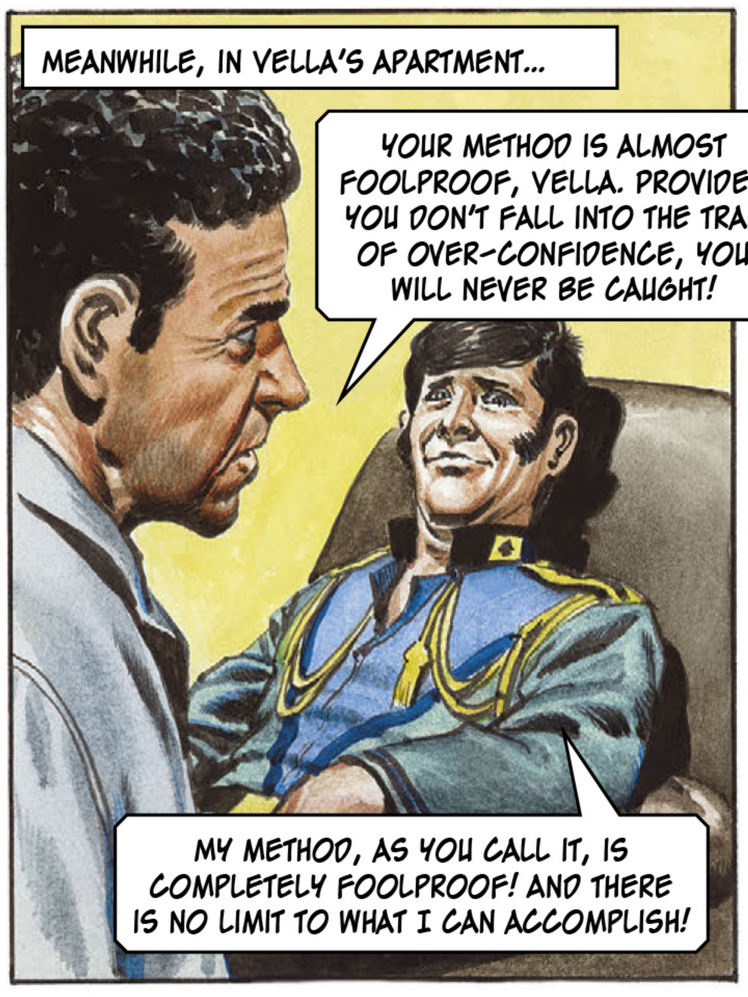
VELLA MATERIALISED FROM HIS OWN VOLUME OF WATER.
I HAD AN IDEA THAT HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY WOULD TRY TO TRICK ME. TOO BAD YOU GOT YOURSELF LANDED WITH THE JOB, JANNO!


HE WAS PICKED UP – TOGETHER WITH THE MONEY – BY HIS ACCOMPLICE.
BY THE STARS! THAT TWO MILLION ZERSTS WAS EASILY EARNED!
THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING, ZERROS MY FRIEND. WE SHALL SOON BE THE RICHEST FELLOWS ON ELEKTON!

IT WAS SOME DAYS BEFORE JANNO RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS IN A TRIGAN CITY CLINIC.
TELL US ANYTHING YOU CAN REMEMBER, JANNO. ANY CLUE – HOWEVER SEEMINGLY UNIMPORTANT – COULD BE VITAL.
WATER... THE WATER CAME TOWARDS ME... IT SEEMED TO HAVE... A LIFE OF ITS OWN!

SOMETHING CLICKED IN PERIC'S BRILLIANT MIND.
WATER... AND ALIVE? MY INVENTION! THAT DIABOLICAL EXPERIMENT I STUMBLED UPON!

THE GREAT SCIENTIST HURRIED ROUND TO HIS LABORATORY.
GONE! THE RED FOLDER CONTAINING MY NOTES AND DIAGRAMS!


MEANWHILE, IN VELLA'S APARTMENT...
YOUR METHOD IS ALMOST FOOLPROOF, VELLA. PROVIDED YOU DON'T FALL INTO THE TRAP OF OVER-CONFIDENCE, YOU WILL NEVER BE CAUGHT!
MY METHOD, AS YOU CALL IT, IS COMPLETELY FOOLPROOF! AND THERE IS NO LIMIT TO WHAT I CAN ACCOMPLISH!

FOR INSTANCE, TAKE THE KING OF DAVELI – THAT UNFORTUNATE MONARCH WHOSE CROWN JEWELS I HAVE ALREADY PURLOINED – WHO IS FLYING HOME TOMORROW AFTER HIS DISASTROUS STATE VISIT. I INTEND TO KIDNAP HIM AND HOLD HIM TO RANSOM!

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, THE EMPEROR BADE FAREWELL TO HIS GUEST, THE KING OF DAVELI.

YOUR MAJESTY, IT GRIEVES ME THAT YOUR VISIT HAS BEEN MARRED BY THE LOSS OF YOUR JEWELS. BUT BE ASSURED THAT NO EFFORT WILL BE SPARED TO RECOVER THEM.

I THANK YOU, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

THE ROYAL AIRLINER SOARED SKYWARDS.

IT WAS SOME TIME LATER THAT THE KING NOTICED WATER SEEPING INTO HIS COMPARTMENT...

STRANGE?!

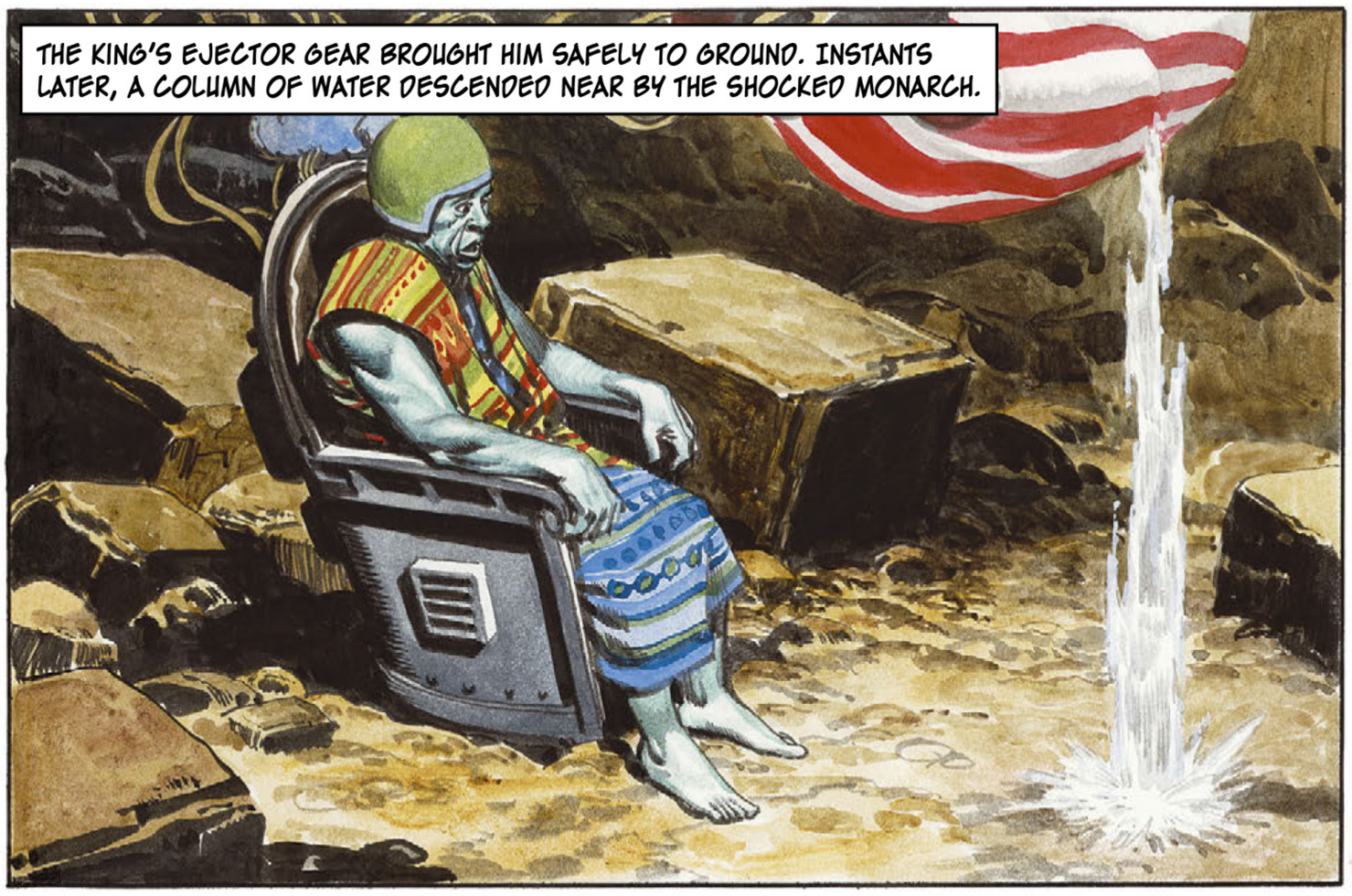
THEN, BEFORE HIS ASTONISHED EYES, A FIGURE MATERIALISED FROM THE WATER...

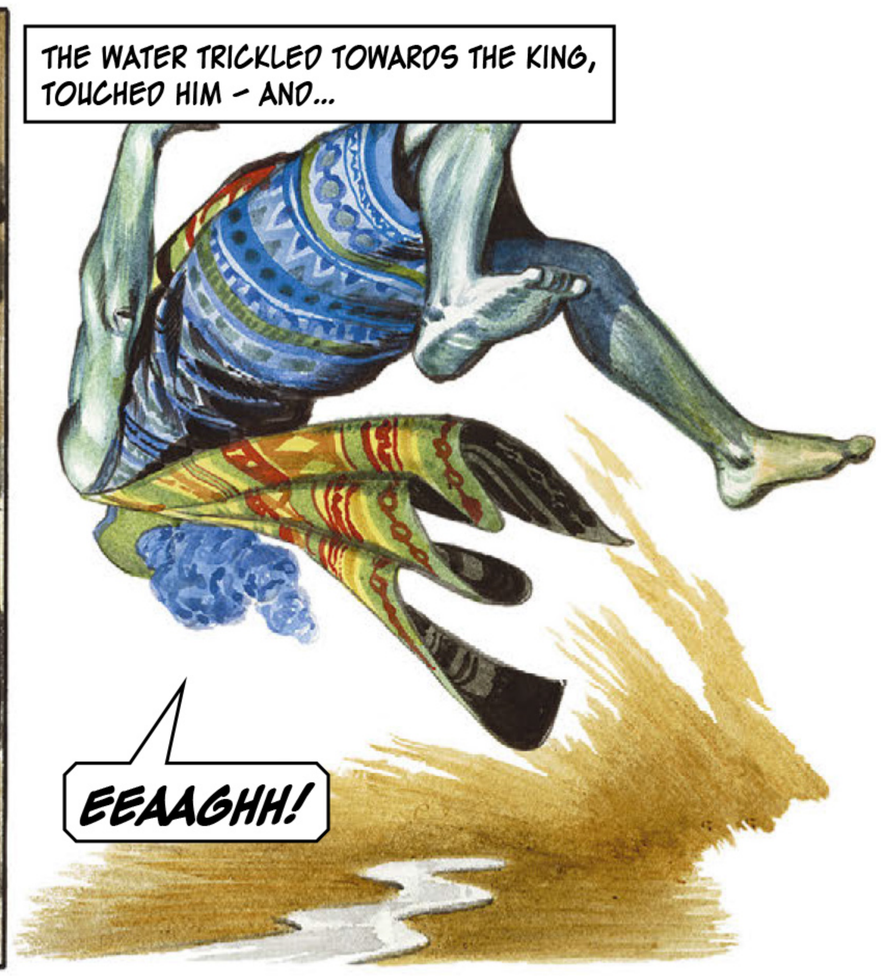
AAAH! WHO ARE YOU?

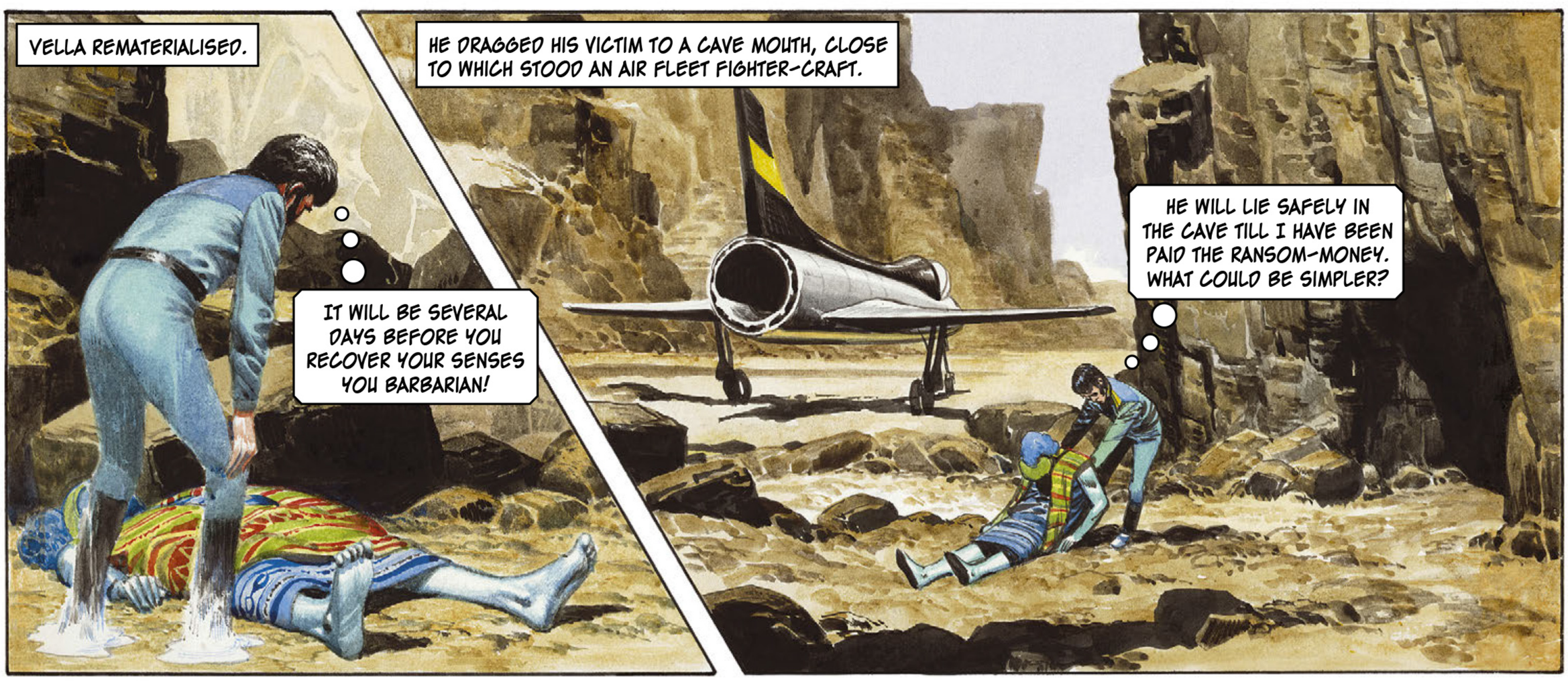
FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELT, YOU ROYAL BARBARIAN! YOU ARE GOING FOR A RIDE!

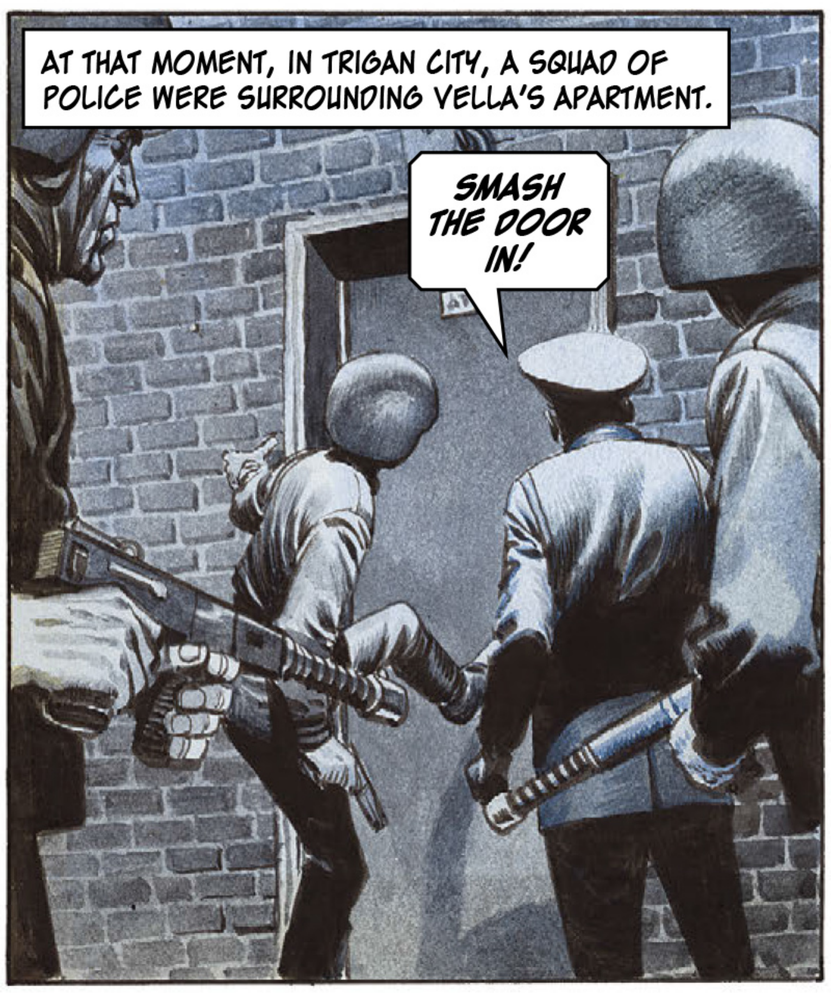
AN INSTANT LATER, THE TERRIFIED MONARCH WAS EJECTED FROM HIS AIRLINER!

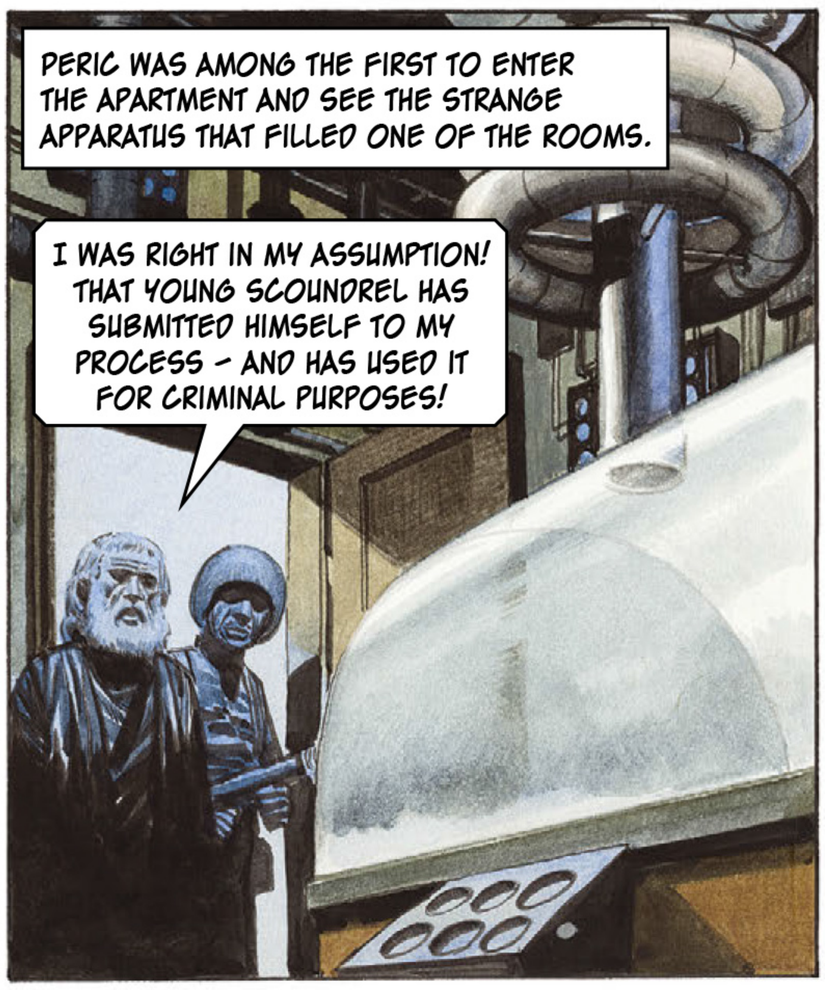
AAAAH!

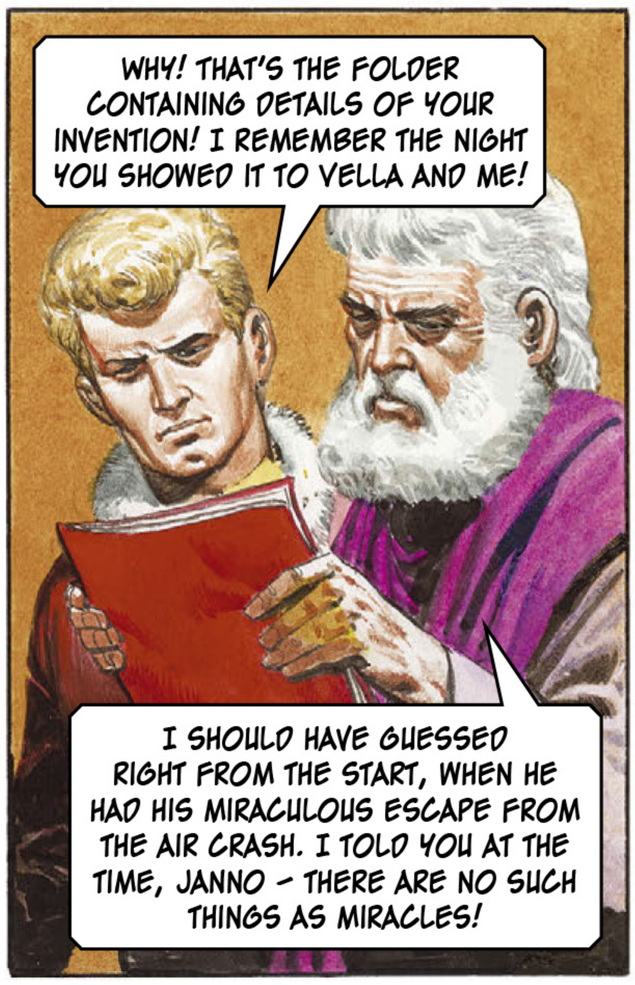

THE KING'S EJECTOR GEAR BROUGHT HIM SAFELY TO GROUND. INSTANTS LATER, A COLUMN OF WATER DESCENDED NEAR BY THE SHOCKED MONARCH.

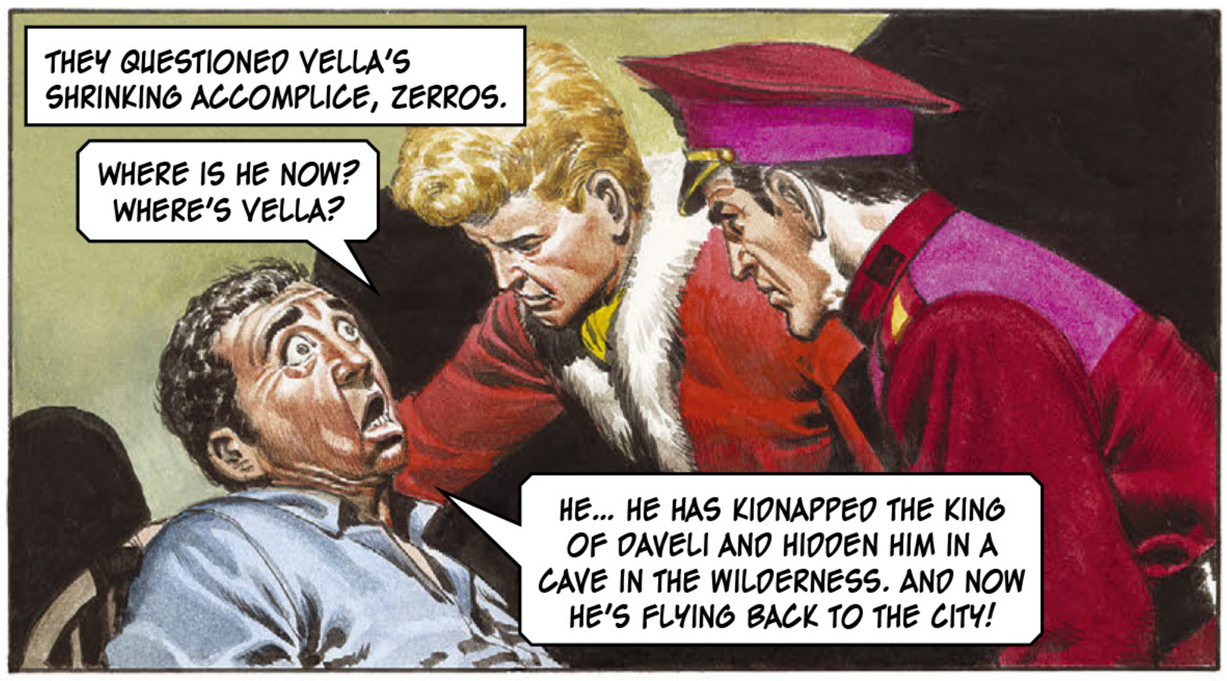

THE WATER TRICKLED TOWARDS THE KING, TOUCHED HIM – AND...
EEAAGHH!


VELLA REMATERIALISED.
IT WILL BE SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE YOU RECOVER YOUR SENSES YOU BARBARIAN!
HE DRAGGED HIS VICTIM TO A CAVE MOUTH, CLOSE TO WHICH STOOD AN AIR FLEET FIGHTER-CRAFT.
HE WILL LIE SAFELY IN THE CAVE TILL I HAVE BEEN PAID THE RANSOM-MONEY. WHAT COULD BE SIMPLER?


AT THAT MOMENT, IN TRIGAN CITY, A SQUAD OF POLICE WERE SURROUNDING VELLA'S APARTMENT.
SMASH THE DOOR IN!

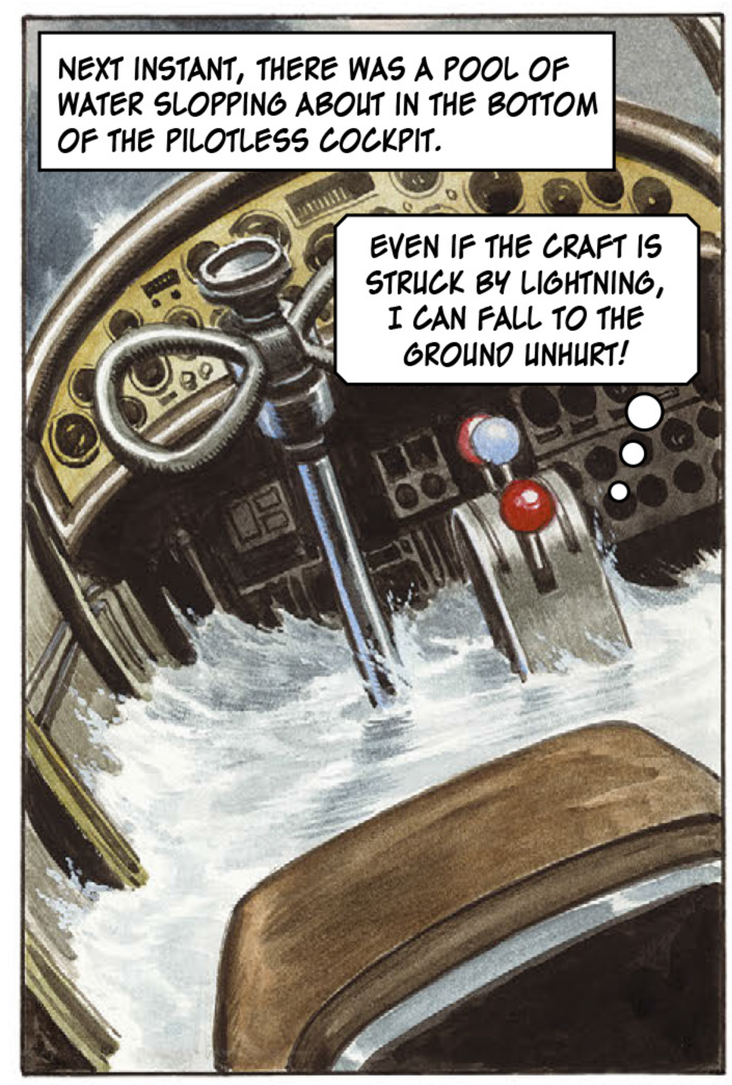

PERIC WAS AMONG THE FIRST TO ENTER THE APARTMENT AND SEE THE STRANGE APPARATUS THAT FILLED ONE OF THE ROOMS.
I WAS RIGHT IN MY ASSUMPTION! THAT YOUNG SCOUNDREL HAS SUBMITTED HIMSELF TO MY PROCESS – AND HAS USED IT FOR CRIMINAL PURPOSES!

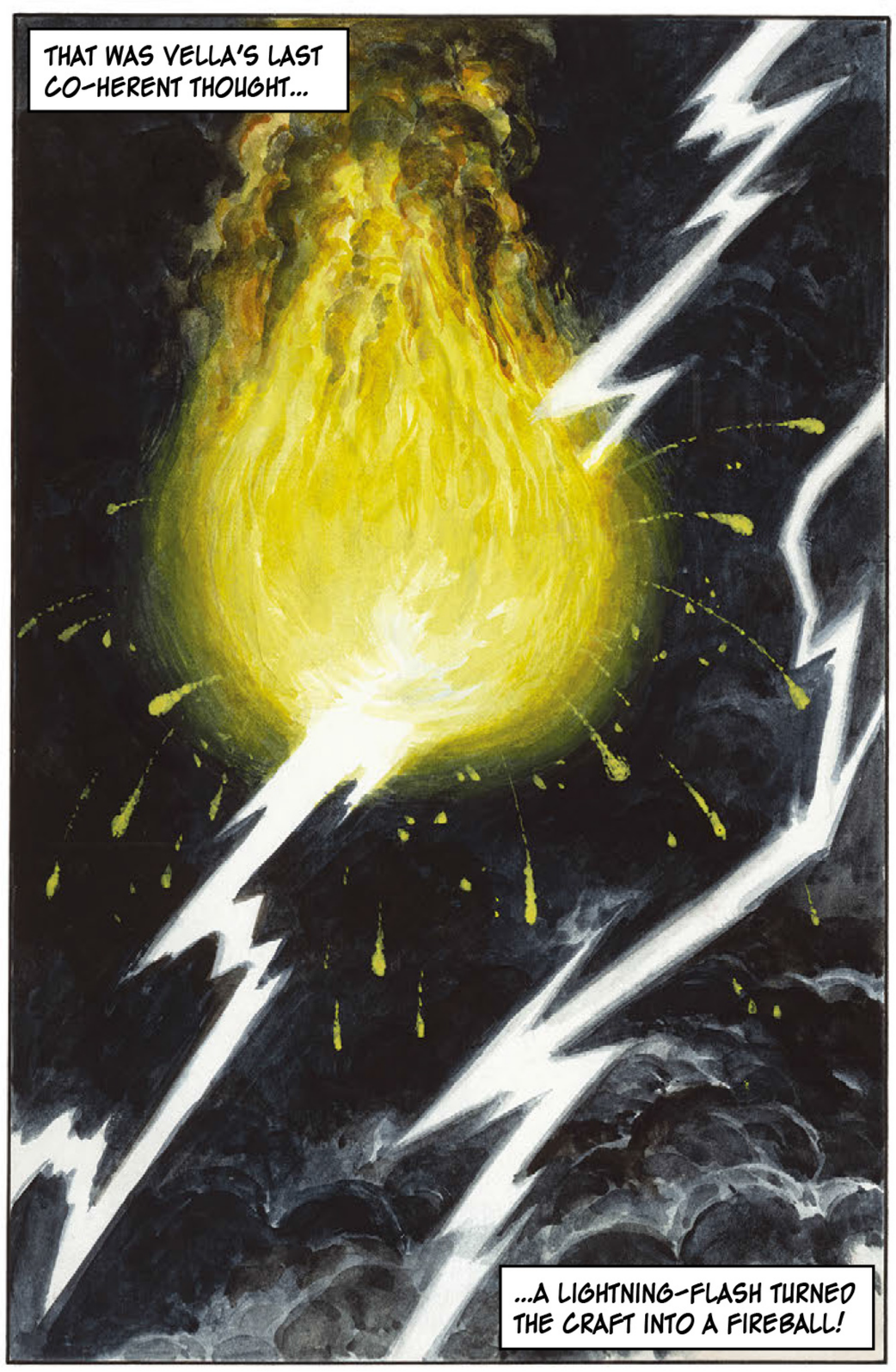

WHY! THAT'S THE FOLDER CONTAINING DETAILS OF YOUR INVENTION! I REMEMBER THE NIGHT YOU SHOWED IT TO VELLA AND ME!
I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED RIGHT FROM THE START, WHEN HE HAD HIS MIRACULOUS ESCAPE FROM THE AIR CRASH. I TOLD YOU AT THE TIME, JANNO – THERE ARE NO SUCH THINGS AS MIRACLES!

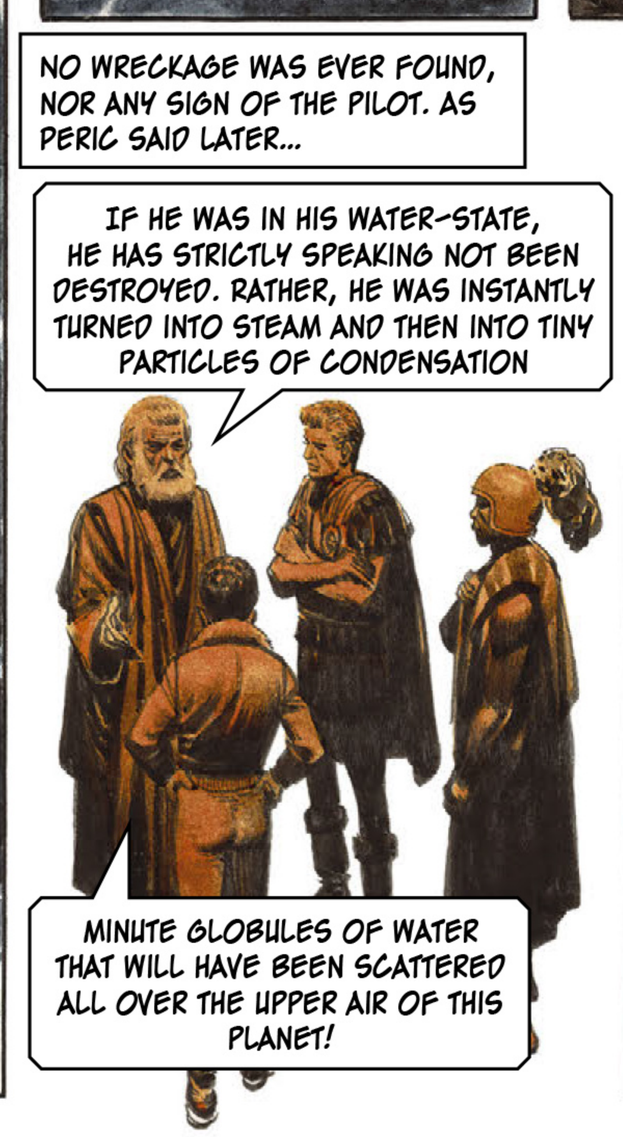

THEY QUESTIONED VELLA'S SHRINKING ACCOMPLICE, ZERROS.
WHERE IS HE NOW? WHERE'S VELLA?
HE... HE HAS KIDNAPPED THE KING OF DAVELI AND HIDDEN HIM IN A CAVE IN THE WILDERNESS. AND NOW HE'S FLYING BACK TO THE CITY!

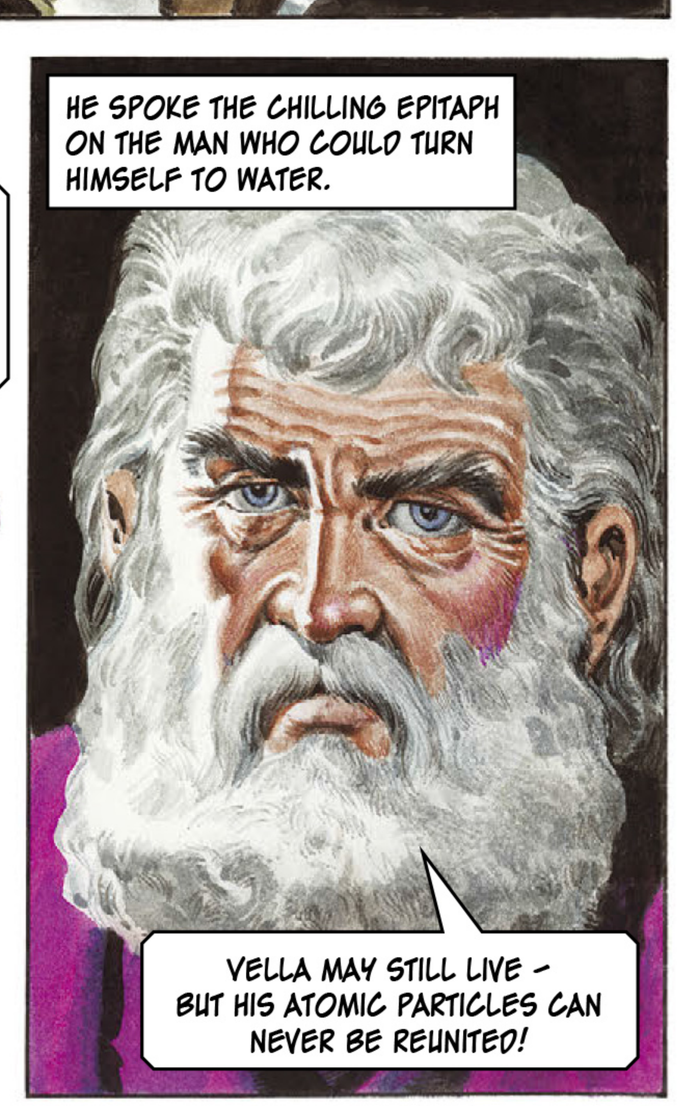
PERIC LOOKED GRIMLY OUT INTO THE STORM-BLACKENED SKY.
HE'LL HAVE AN UNPLEASANT FLIGHT THROUGH THAT!
STORM WARNINGS HAVE GONE OUT AND ALL AIRCRAFT IN THE AREA HAVE BEEN GROUNDED!

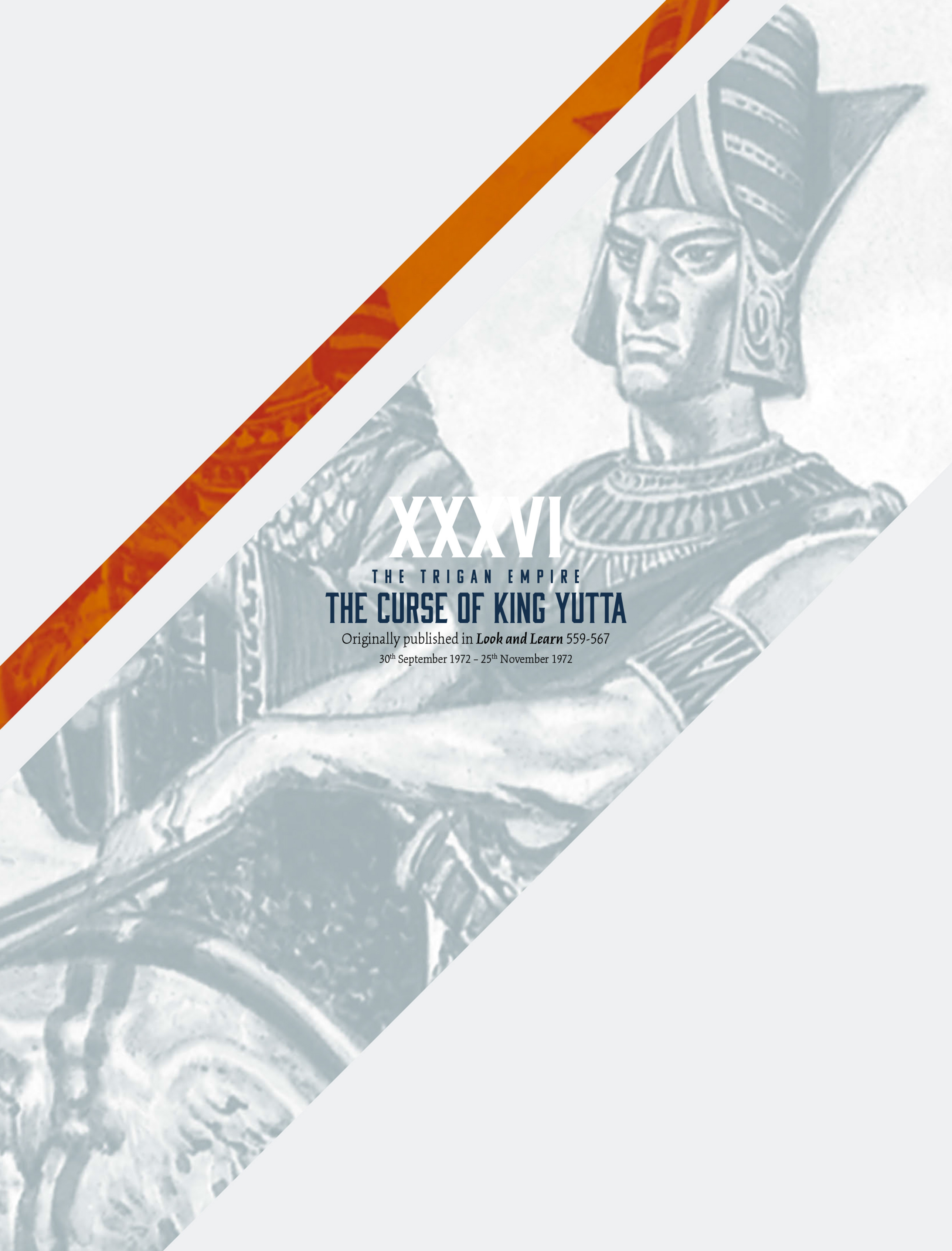
INDEED, VELLA'S CRAFT WAS FLYING THROUGH THE THICK OF THE AERIAL INFERNO!
THE BEST THING I CAN DO IS TO SWITCH ON THE AUTOMATIC PILOT AND TURN MYSELF INTO MY WATER-STATE. THEN I SHALL BE INDESTRUCTIBLE!


NEXT INSTANT, THERE WAS A POOL OF WATER SLOPPING ABOUT IN THE BOTTOM OF THE PILOTLESS COCKPIT.
EVEN IF THE CRAFT IS STRUCK BY LIGHTNING, I CAN FALL TO THE GROUND UNHURT!


THAT WAS VELLA'S LAST CO-HERENT THOUGHT...
...A LIGHTNING-FLASH TURNED THE CRAFT INTO A FIREBALL!


NO WRECKAGE WAS EVER FOUND, NOR ANY SIGN OF THE PILOT. AS PERIC SAID LATER...
IF HE WAS IN HIS WATER-STATE, HE HAS STRICTLY SPEAKING NOT BEEN DESTROYED. RATHER, HE WAS INSTANTLY TURNED INTO STEAM AND THEN INTO TINY PARTICLES OF CONDENSATION
MINUTE GLOBULES OF WATER THAT WILL HAVE BEEN SCATTERED ALL OVER THE UPPER AIR OF THIS PLANET!


HE SPOKE THE CHILLING EPITAPH ON THE MAN WHO COULD TURN HIMSELF TO WATER.
VELLA MAY STILL LIVE – BUT HIS ATOMIC PARTICLES CAN NEVER BE REUNITED!



XXXVI

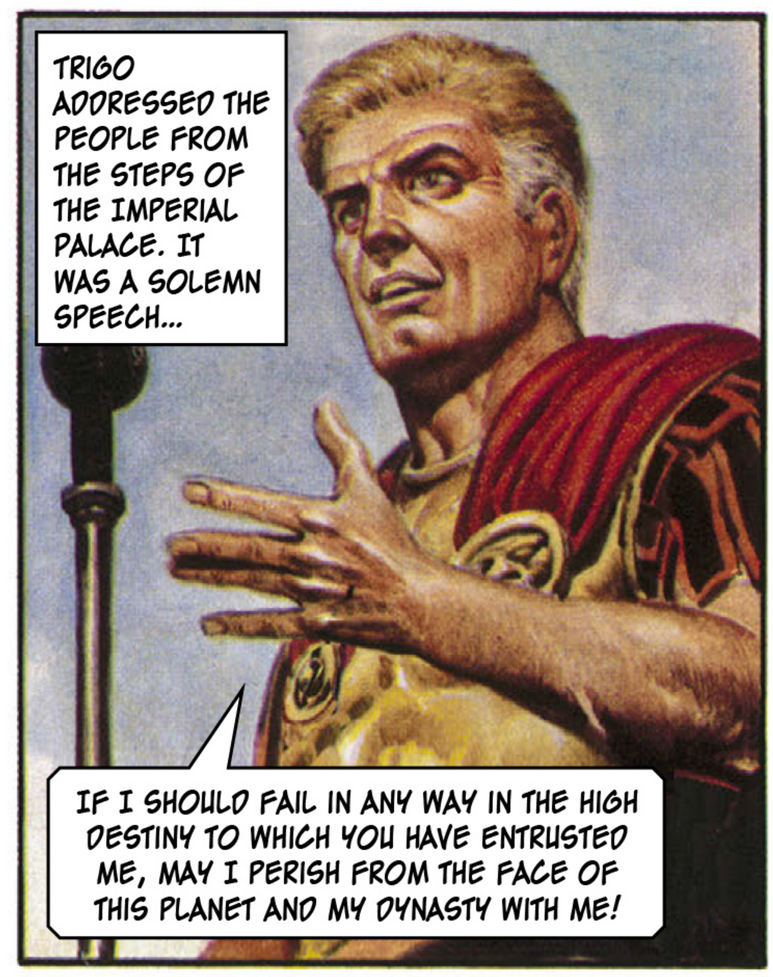
THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

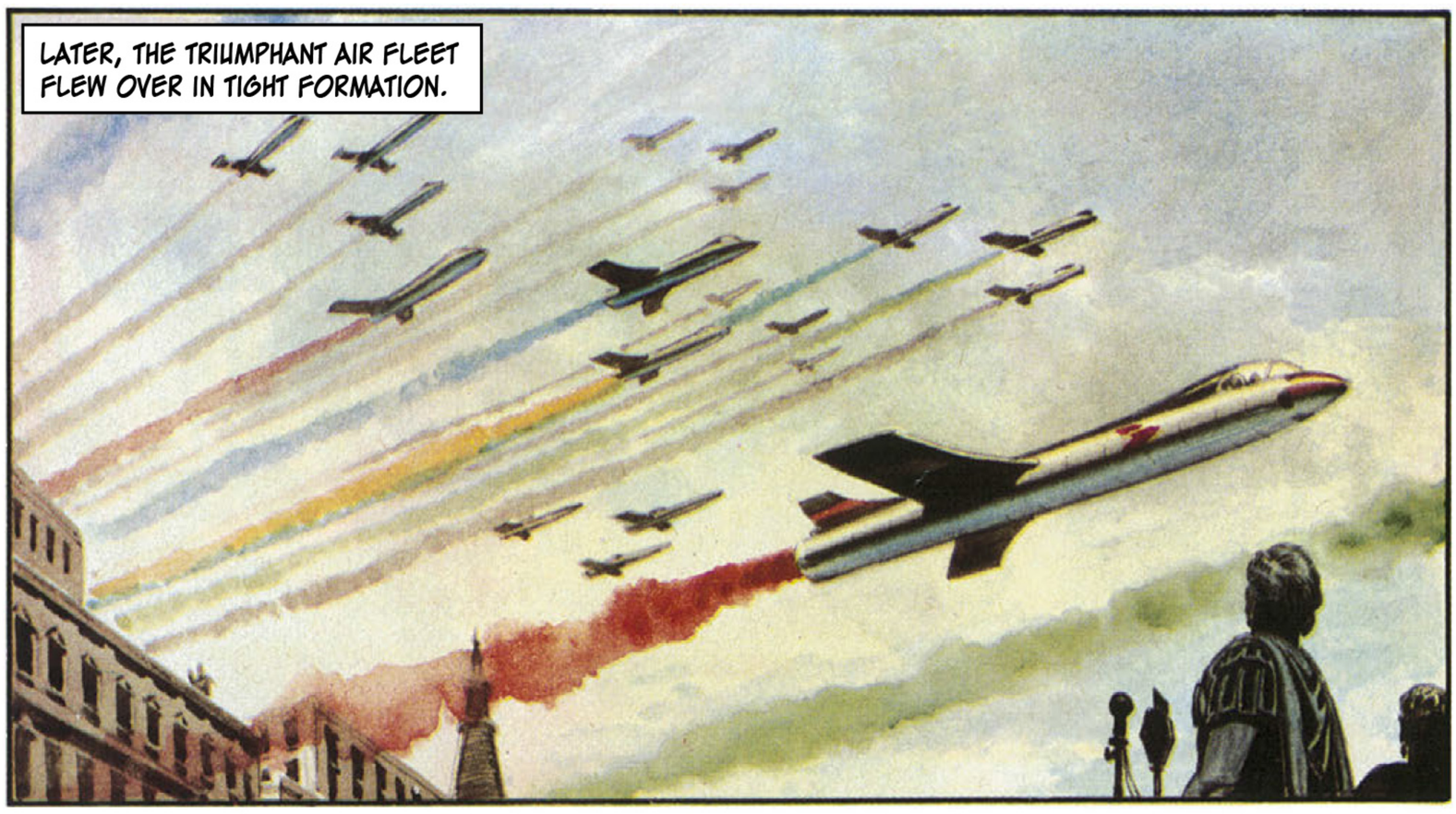
THE CURSE OF KING YUTTA

Originally published in ***Look and Learn*** 559-567

30th September 1972 – 25th November 1972

IN THE SECOND YEAR OF ZISS, THERE WAS A GREAT JUBILEE IN HONOUR OF THE EMPIRE'S FOUNDING. TRIGO RODE IN PROCESSION THROUGH THE STREETS OF HIS CAPITAL.
LONG LIVE THE EMPEROR!


TRIGO ADDRESSED THE PEOPLE FROM THE STEPS OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE. IT WAS A SOLEMN SPEECH...
IF I SHOULD FAIL IN ANY WAY IN THE HIGH DESTINY TO WHICH YOU HAVE ENTRUSTED ME, MAY I PERISH FROM THE FACE OF THIS PLANET AND MY DYNASTY WITH ME!

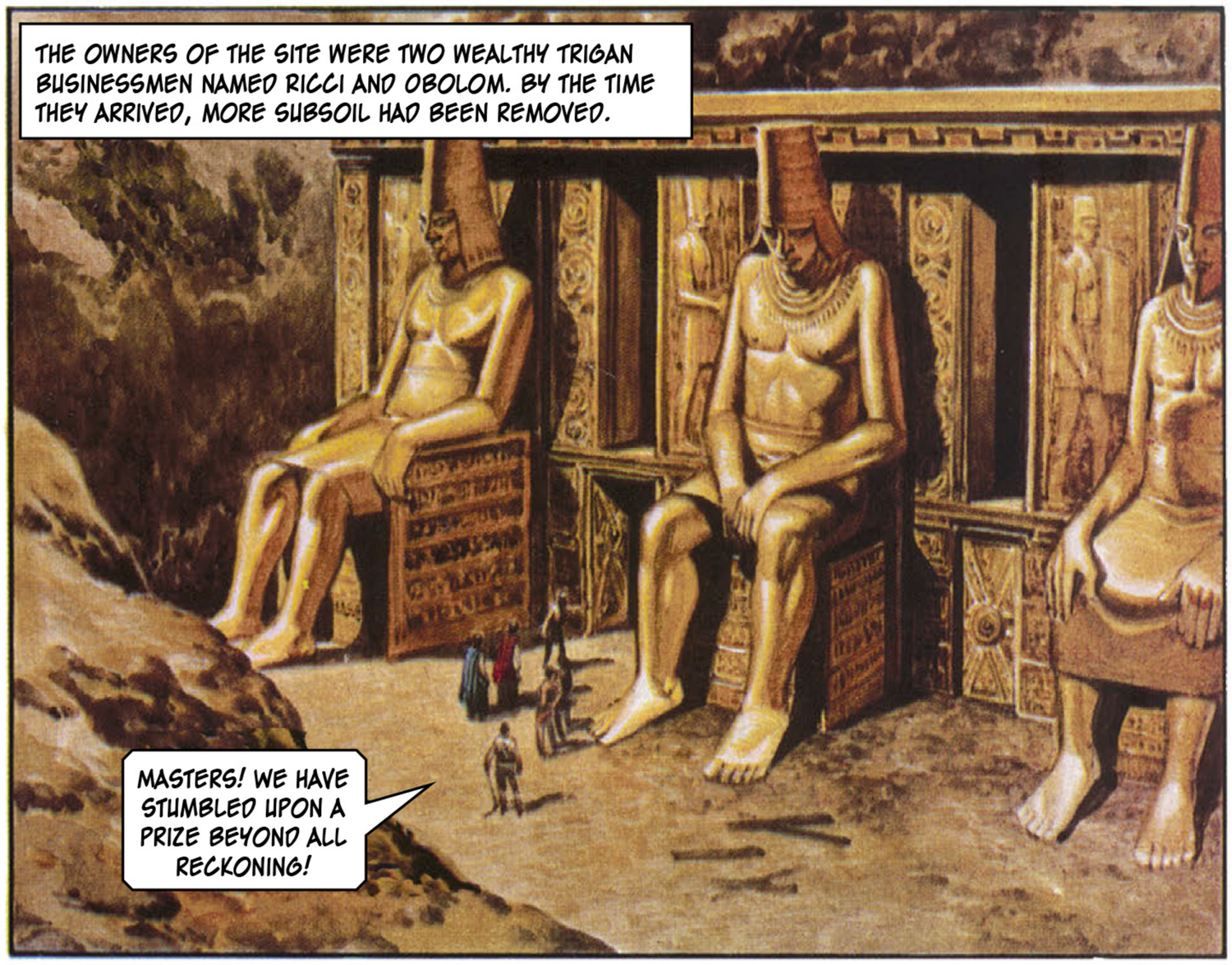

LATER, THE TRIUMPHANT AIR FLEET FLEW OVER IN TIGHT FORMATION.

JANNO LOOKED DOWN FROM THE COCKPIT OF HIS FIGHTING-CRAFT.
BLESS YOU, UNCLE TRIGO! DON'T EVER LEAVE US!

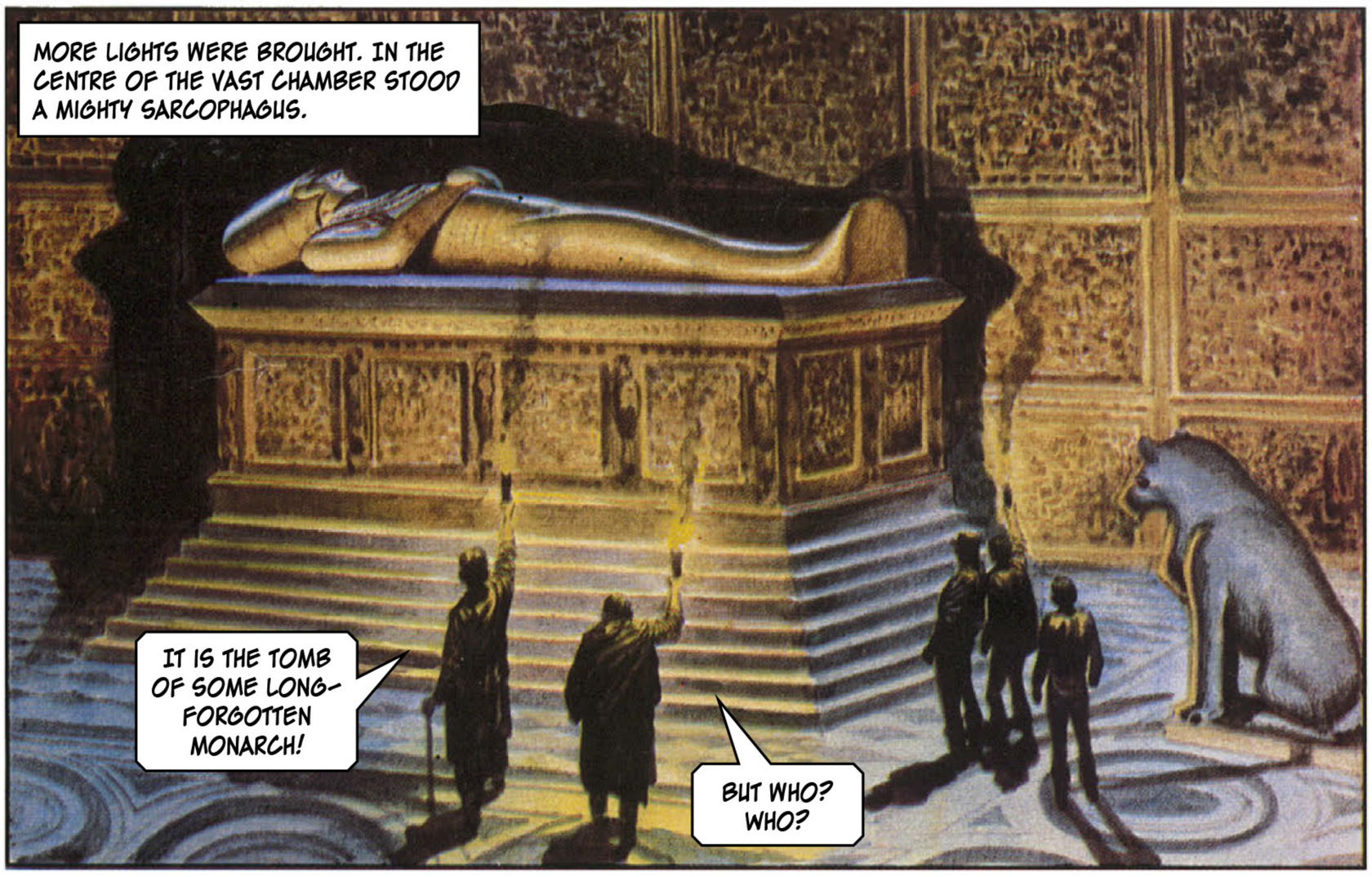
IT WAS IN THAT SAME YEAR THAT A VAST AREA OF THE CITY WAS EXCAVATED FOR THE BUILDING OF A GIANT SKYSCRAPER BLOCK.

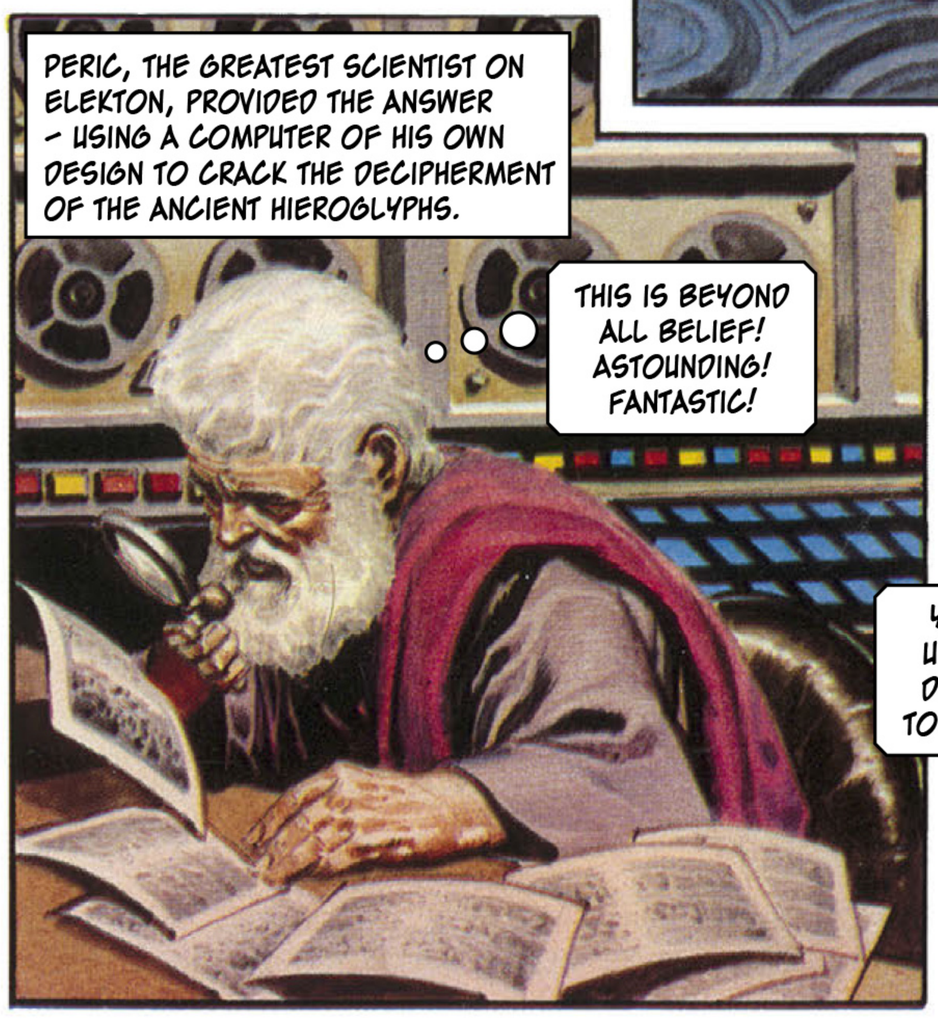
ONE DAY, SUBSOIL FELL AWAY TO REVEAL...
WHY – IT'S A DOOR!

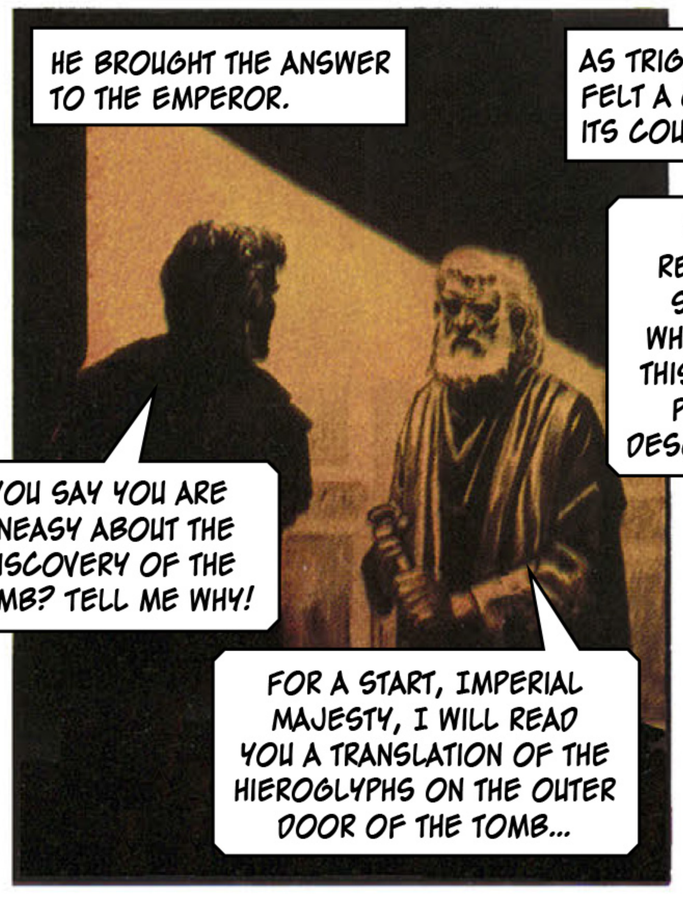
THE WORKMEN FORCED THE DOOR AND PEERED INTO THE GLOOM WITHIN. WHAT THEY SAW MADE THEM CRY OUT IN AWE.
BY ALL THE STARS!
WHAT HAVE WE FOUND?


THE OWNERS OF THE SITE WERE TWO WEALTHY TRIGAN BUSINESSMEN NAMED RICCI AND OBOLOM. BY THE TIME THEY ARRIVED, MORE SUBSOIL HAD BEEN REMOVED.
MASTERS! WE HAVE STUMBLED UPON A PRIZE BEYOND ALL RECKONING!

RICCI AND OBOLOM WERE THE FIRST TO SET FOOT IN THE FAR RECESSES OF THE STRANGE BUILDING.
IS IT... A TEMPLE?
NO - A TOMB! LOOK!


MORE LIGHTS WERE BROUGHT. IN THE CENTRE OF THE VAST CHAMBER STOOD A MIGHTY SARCOPHAGUS.
IT IS THE TOMB OF SOME LONG-FORGOTTEN MONARCH!
BUT WHO? WHO?


PERIC, THE GREATEST SCIENTIST ON ELEKTON, PROVIDED THE ANSWER - USING A COMPUTER OF HIS OWN DESIGN TO CRACK THE DECIPHERMENT OF THE ANCIENT HIEROGLYPHS.
THIS IS BEYOND ALL BELIEF! ASTOUNDING! FANTASTIC!


HE BROUGHT THE ANSWER TO THE EMPEROR.
YOU SAY YOU ARE UNEASY ABOUT THE DISCOVERY OF THE TOMB? TELL ME WHY!
FOR A START, IMPERIAL MAJESTY, I WILL READ YOU A TRANSLATION OF THE HIEROGLYPHS ON THE OUTER DOOR OF THE TOMB...

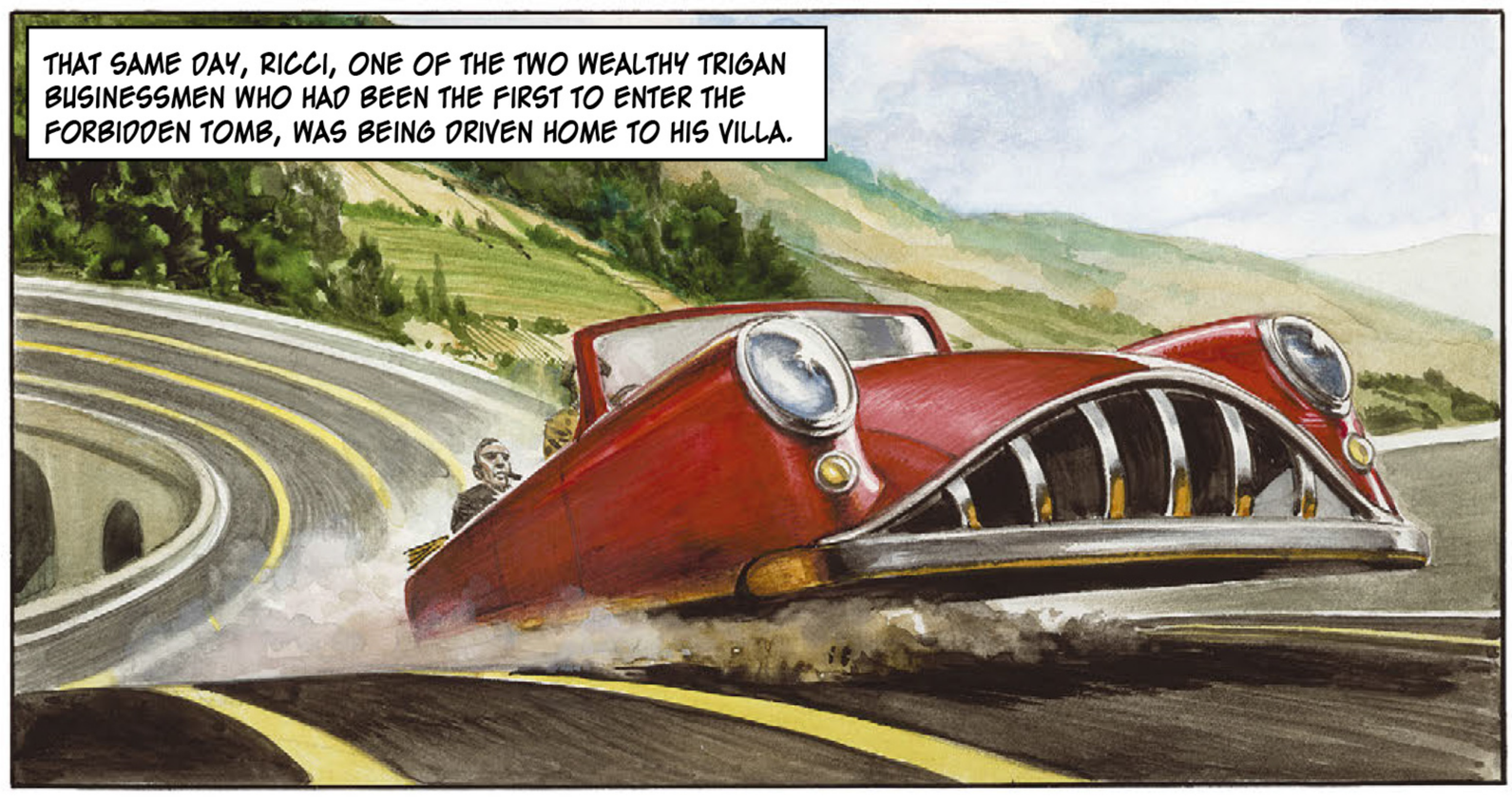
AS TRIGO HEARD THE WORDS, HE FELT A COLD FINGER OF FEAR TRAIL ITS COURSE DOWN HIS SPINE!
"...THEY WHO DEFILE THE RESTING PLACE OF THE KING SHALL SWIFTLY PERISH! HE WHO RULES IN THE LAND WHEN THIS EVIL THING IS DONE SHALL PERISH ALSO! AND ALL HIS DESCENDANTS SHALL ALSO DIE!"

HERE WE SEE THE ANCIENT CITY THAT STOOD ON THE SITE OF THE PRESENT TRIGAN CITY. ITS PEOPLE WERE WARLIKE, PROUD AND SUPERSTITIOUS.
THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF THE LONG-DEAD KING YUTTA, WHOSE MUMMY LIES IN THE NEWLY-DISCOVERED TOMB. HE WAS KNOWN AS THE LORD OF THE SKIES AND SOVEREIGN OF THE STARS!
THE SCIENTIST PERIC ENDED THE ILLUSTRATED LECTURE THAT HE HAD BEEN GIVING TO THE EMPEROR AND THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL.
THERE IS LITTLE ELSE I CAN TELL YOU ABOUT THE LIFE AND TIMES OF KING YUTTA. AS TO THE SO-CALLED CURSE THAT WAS PLACED UPON HIS TOMB ALL THOSE UNCOUNTED CENTURIES AGO...
PERIC WAS INTERRUPTED BY ROTHI, A BLUFF, NO-NONSENSE COUNCILLOR.
THAT'S A LOAD OF RUBBISH! PUT THERE TO FRIGHTEN OLD WOMEN! I VOTE THAT THE DEAD KING AND HIS TREASURES SHOULD BE MOVED TO THE IMPERIAL MUSEUM AND THAT THE PUBLIC BE INVITED TO VIEW THEM FOR AN ENTRANCE FEE OF TWO ZERSTS A HEAD. MAKE A FORTUNE FOR THE IMPERIAL TREASURY, I SHOULDN'T WONDER!
ROTHI'S SUGGESTION WAS CARRIED OUT. IN THE LUNAR MONTHS THAT FOLLOWED, THOUSANDS OF SPELLBOUND PEOPLE FILED THROUGH THE IMPERIAL MUSEUM.
ONE FATEFUL NIGHT, WHEN THE MUSEUM HAD CLOSED AND THE NIGHT-WATCHMAN WAS SETTLING DOWN FOR HIS LONG VIGIL, A STRANGE SOUND ECHOED THROUGH THE HALL.
WHAT'S THAT? WHO'S THERE?

AND THEN...
EEAAGHH!

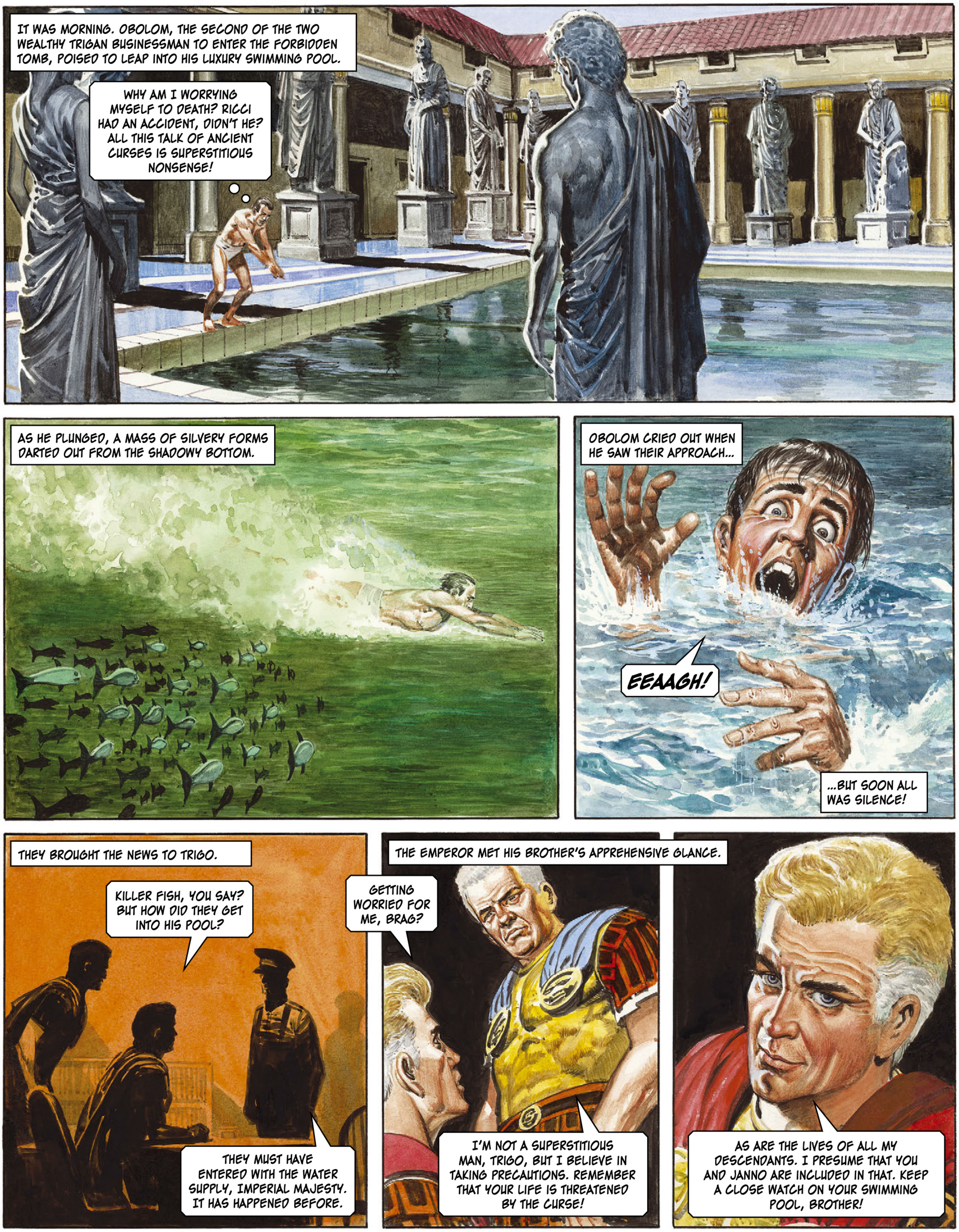
THEY FOUND HIM NEXT MORNING...
WHO COULD HAVE DONE THIS? AND WHY?
DON LAWRENCE

AND THAT WAS NOT ALL.
AAAGH! KING YUTTA HAS GONE!


THAT SAME DAY, RICCI, ONE OF THE TWO WEALTHY TRIGAN BUSINESSMEN WHO HAD BEEN THE FIRST TO ENTER THE FORBIDDEN TOMB, WAS BEING DRIVEN HOME TO HIS VILLA.

SUDDENLY, THE DRIVER SAW... SOMETHING!
AAGGHH!

THEY BROUGHT THE NEWS OF THE DISASTER TO THE EMPEROR.
"THEY WHO DEFILE THE RESTING PLACE OF THE KING SHALL SWIFTLY PERISH!"
IS THE CURSE OF YUTTA COMING TRUE ALREADY?


IT WAS MORNING. OBOLOM, THE SECOND OF THE TWO WEALTHY TRIGAN BUSINESSMAN TO ENTER THE FORBIDDEN TOMB, POISED TO LEAP INTO HIS LUXURY SWIMMING POOL.
WHY AM I WORRYING MYSELF TO DEATH? RICCI HAD AN ACCIDENT, DIDN'T HE? ALL THIS TALK OF ANCIENT CURSES IS SUPERSTITIOUS NONSENSE!
AS HE PLUNGED, A MASS OF SILVERY FORMS DARTED OUT FROM THE SHADOWY BOTTOM.
OBOLOM CRIED OUT WHEN HE SAW THEIR APPROACH...
EEAAGH!
...BUT SOON ALL WAS SILENCE!
THEY BROUGHT THE NEWS TO TRIGO.
KILLER FISH, YOU SAY? BUT HOW DID THEY GET INTO HIS POOL?
THEY MUST HAVE ENTERED WITH THE WATER SUPPLY, IMPERIAL MAJESTY. IT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE.
THE EMPEROR MET HIS BROTHER'S APPREHENSIVE GLANCE.
GETTING WORRIED FOR ME, BRAG?
I'M NOT A SUPERSTITIOUS MAN, TRIGO, BUT I BELIEVE IN TAKING PRECAUTIONS. REMEMBER THAT YOUR LIFE IS THREATENED BY THE CURSE!
AS ARE THE LIVES OF ALL MY DESCENDANTS. I PRESUME THAT YOU AND JANNO ARE INCLUDED IN THAT. KEEP A CLOSE WATCH ON YOUR SWIMMING POOL, BROTHER!

SINCE THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE ROYAL MUMMY, THE MUSEUM HAD BEEN CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC. PERIC WENT THERE THAT DAY, ACCOMPANIED BY YOUNG KEREN.

IT WOULD TAKE TEN STRONG MEN TO LIFT THAT HUGE LID FROM THE SARCOPHAGUS, PERIC.

TEN STRONG MEN – OR SOME SUPERNATURAL FORCE!

THE GREAT SCIENTIST POINTED.

DO YOU SEE THIS SERIES OF SYMBOLS? THEY ARE DIFFERENT TO THE HIEROGLYPHS I WAS ABLE TO DECIPHER. I SUSPECT IT IS SOME SORT OF CODE I HAVE YET TO CRACK.

PERHAPS IT WILL THROW SOME LIGHT ON THE ANCIENT CURSE.

THEY TURNED AT THE SOUND OF BRAG'S BOOMING VOICE.

STILL DABBLING WITH THAT INFERNAL OLD RUBBISH, PERIC? I WANT A WORD WITH YOU, KEREN. GOT A JOB FOR YOU.

YES, LORD BRAG?

THIS CURSE NONSENSE. THE EMPEROR SCORNS TO TAKE ANY PRECAUTIONS FOR HIS SAFETY, SO I'M DOING IT FOR HIM – SECRETLY. TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE, HE'LL BE GUARDED, DAY AND NIGHT, BY PICKED AND TRUSTED PATRIOTS.

I SHALL COUNT IT AN HONOUR TO BE ONE OF THEM, MY LORD.

THAT NIGHT, KEREN WENT ON DUTY AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE.

STATION YOURSELF NEAR THE EMPEROR'S DOOR AND RAISE THE ALARM IF YOU SEE OR HEAR ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS. YOU WILL BE RELIEVED BY ANOTHER OFFICER AT THE SECOND QUARTER OF THE NIGHT.

VERY GOOD, MY LORD.

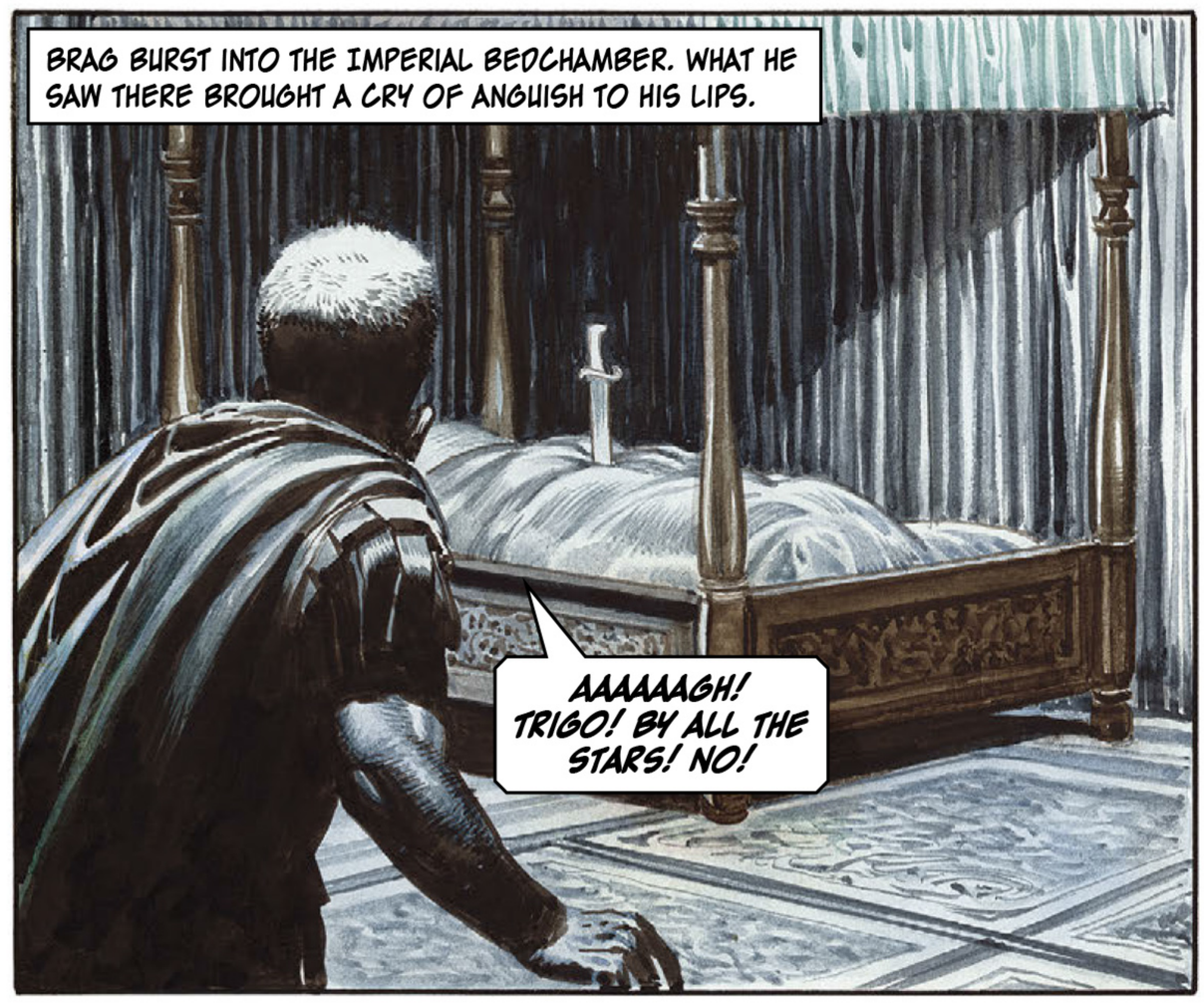
ALONE IN THE SILENCE OF THE GREAT BUILDING...

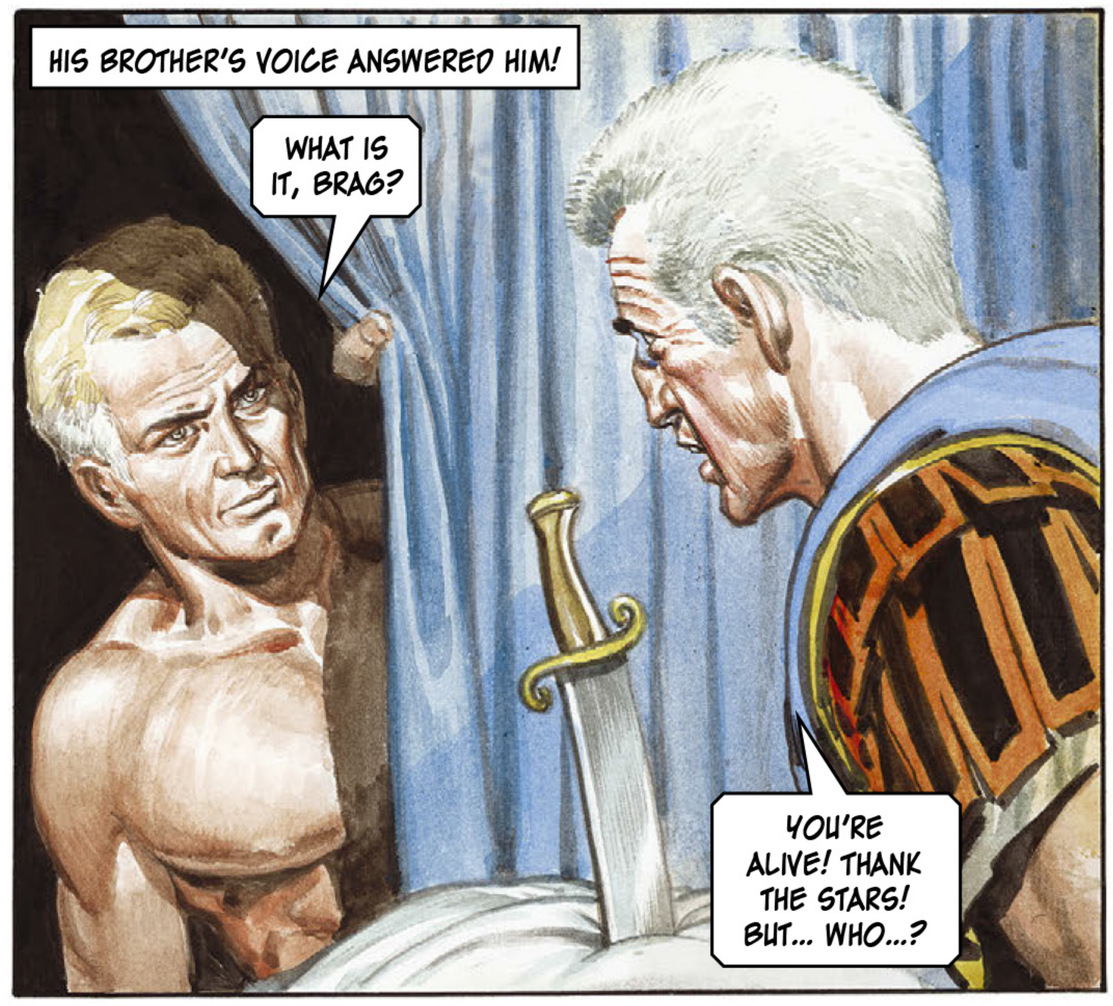
...HE NEITHER SAW NOR HEARD THE THING THAT MENACED HIM!

MOMENTS LATER, KEREN FELL TO THE FLOOR IN A SENSELESS HEAP. AND THE DOOR OF THE EMPEROR'S CHAMBER SWUNG SILENTLY OPEN.

THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE NIGHT HAD SLIPPED PAST BEFORE KEREN WAS DISCOVERED.
KEREN! WHAT'S AMISS WITH YOU?
LORD BRAG...

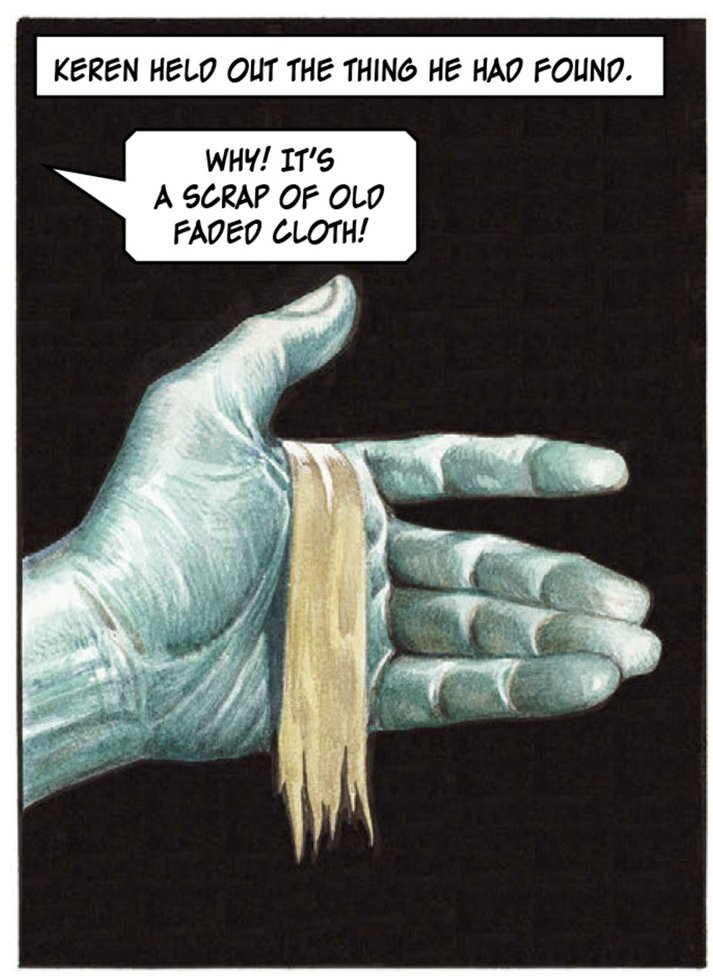
SOMETHING... SOMEONE TOOK ME BY THE THROAT...
THE EMPEROR!

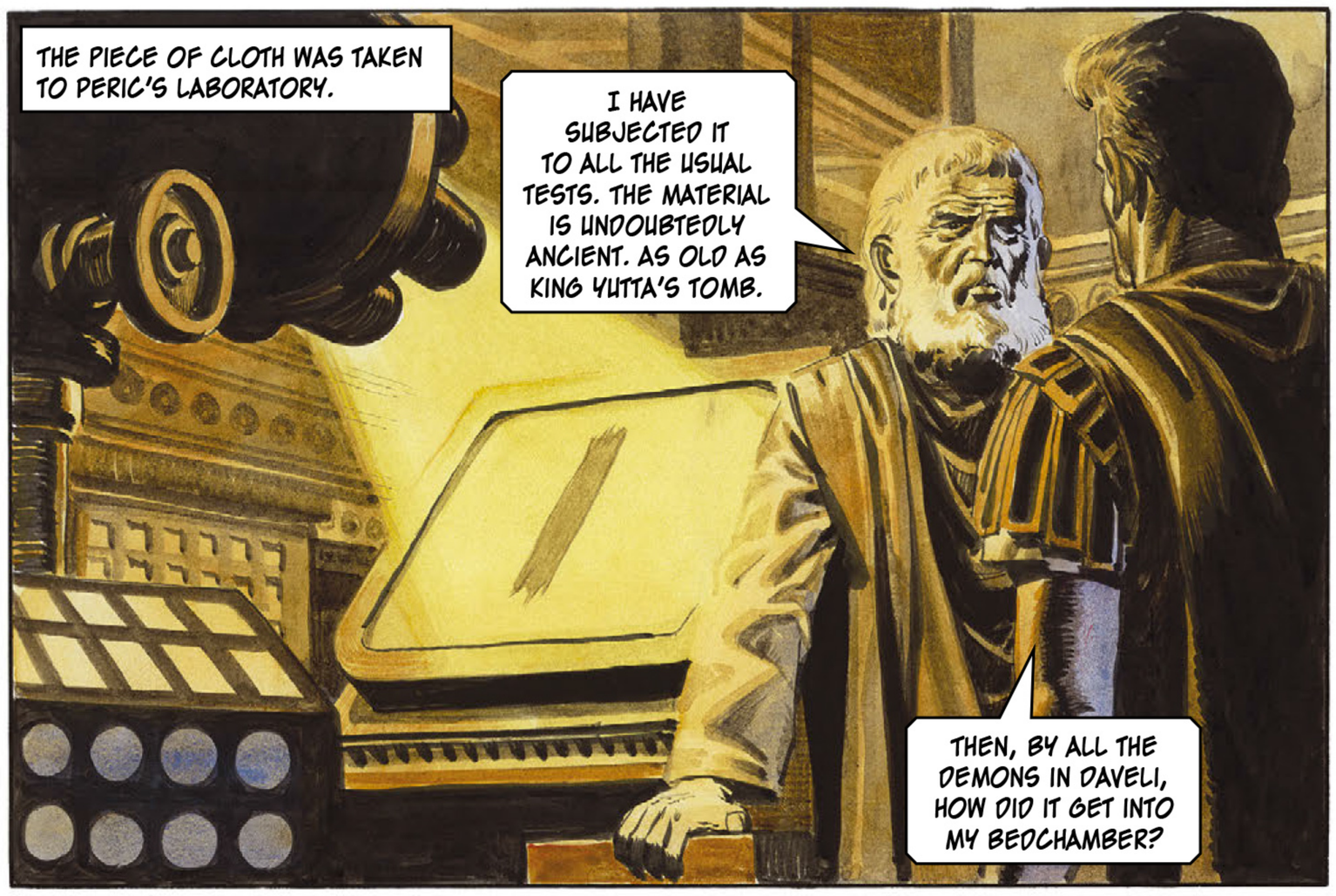

BRAG BURST INTO THE IMPERIAL BEDCHAMBER. WHAT HE SAW THERE BROUGHT A CRY OF ANGUISH TO HIS LIPS.
AAAAAAGH! TRIGO! BY ALL THE STARS! NO!

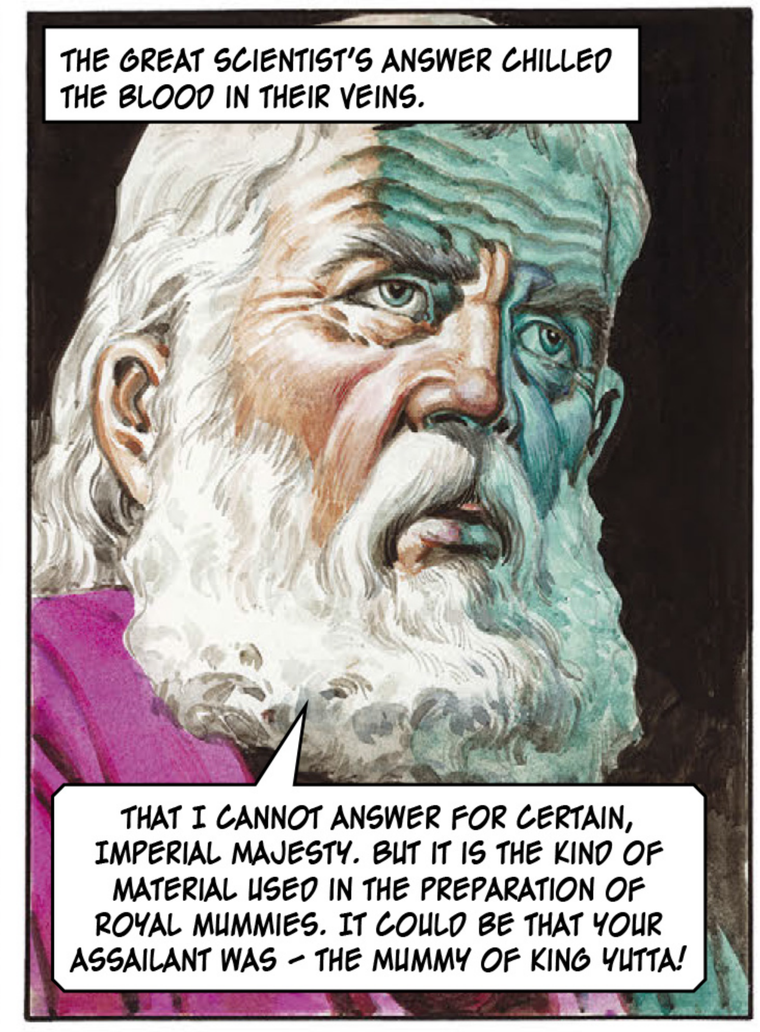

HIS BROTHER'S VOICE ANSWERED HIM!
WHAT IS IT, BRAG?
YOU'RE ALIVE! THANK THE STARS! BUT... WHO...?

I SLEPT OUT ON THE BALCONY AND LEFT – THIS... JUST AS A PRECAUTION!

THE PRECAUTION WAS WELL-TAKEN, BROTHER! IT'S A WONDER YOU NEVER HEARD YOUR WOULD-BE ASSASSIN, LIGHT SLEEPER THAT YOU ARE. HE MUST HAVE MOVED WITH THE SILENCE OF THE GRAVE!
SOMETHING HERE, ON THE FLOOR!


KEREN HELD OUT THE THING HE HAD FOUND.
WHY! IT'S A SCRAP OF OLD FADED CLOTH!





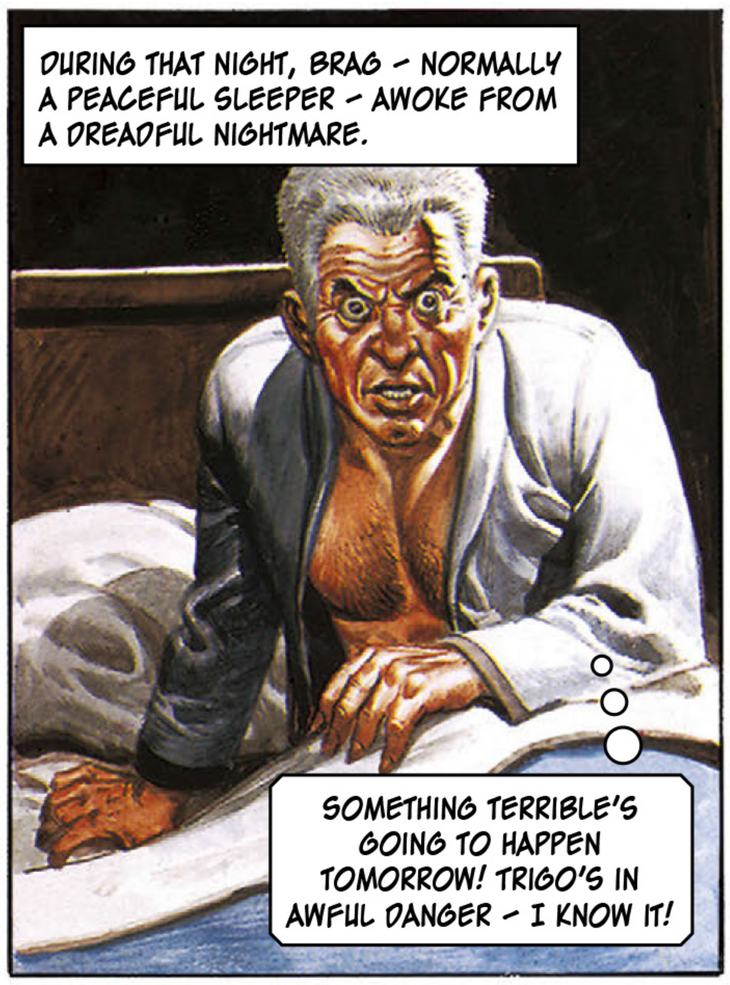
"THE KING'S CURSE" WAS THE SENSATION OF ELEKTON. THE VIEWS OF PROMINENT CITIZENS WERE EAGERLY CANVASSED.

COUNCILLOR ROTHI, IT WAS YOU WHO PROPOSED THE MOTION TO PLACE THE MUMMY AND ITS TREASURES ON PUBLIC DISPLAY. DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU MAY HAVE BROUGHT DOWN THE CURSE UPON YOUR HEAD?

DON'T TALK RUBBISH, FELLOW!

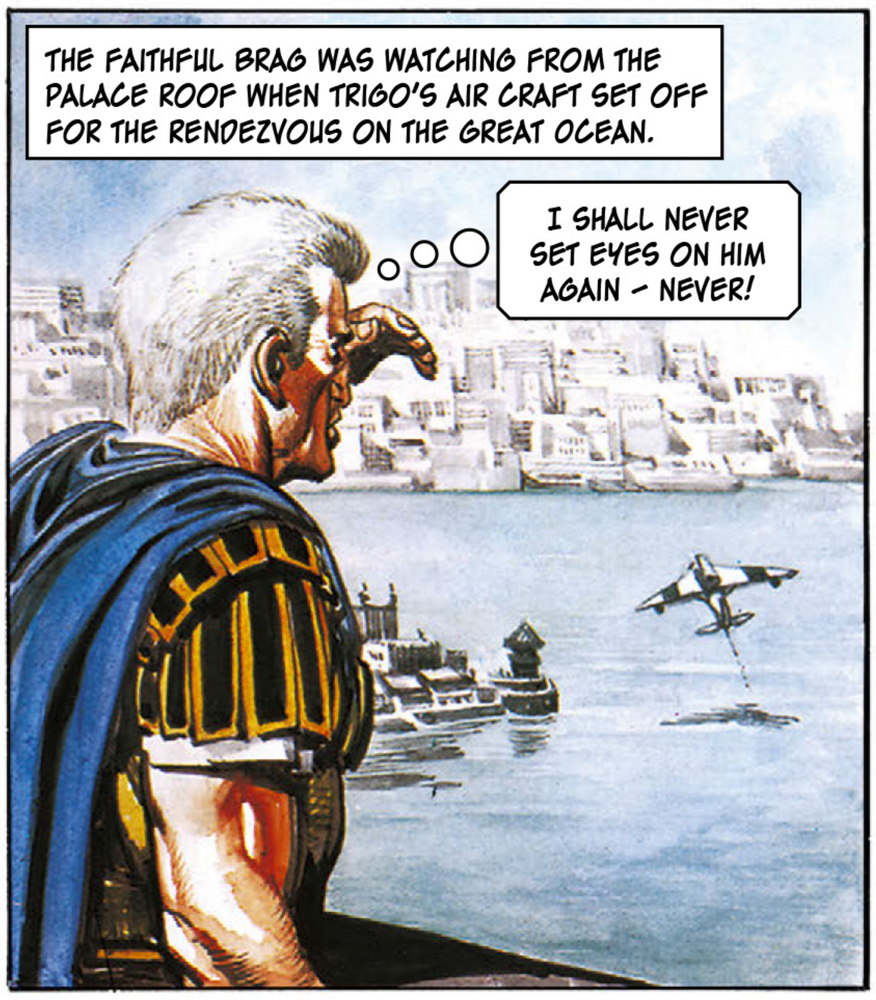
THE BLUFF, NO-NONSENSE COUNCILLOR ROTHI TOOK OFF IN HIS PRIVATE AIR CRAFT – AND DISAPPEARED FROM THE SIGHT OF MEN!

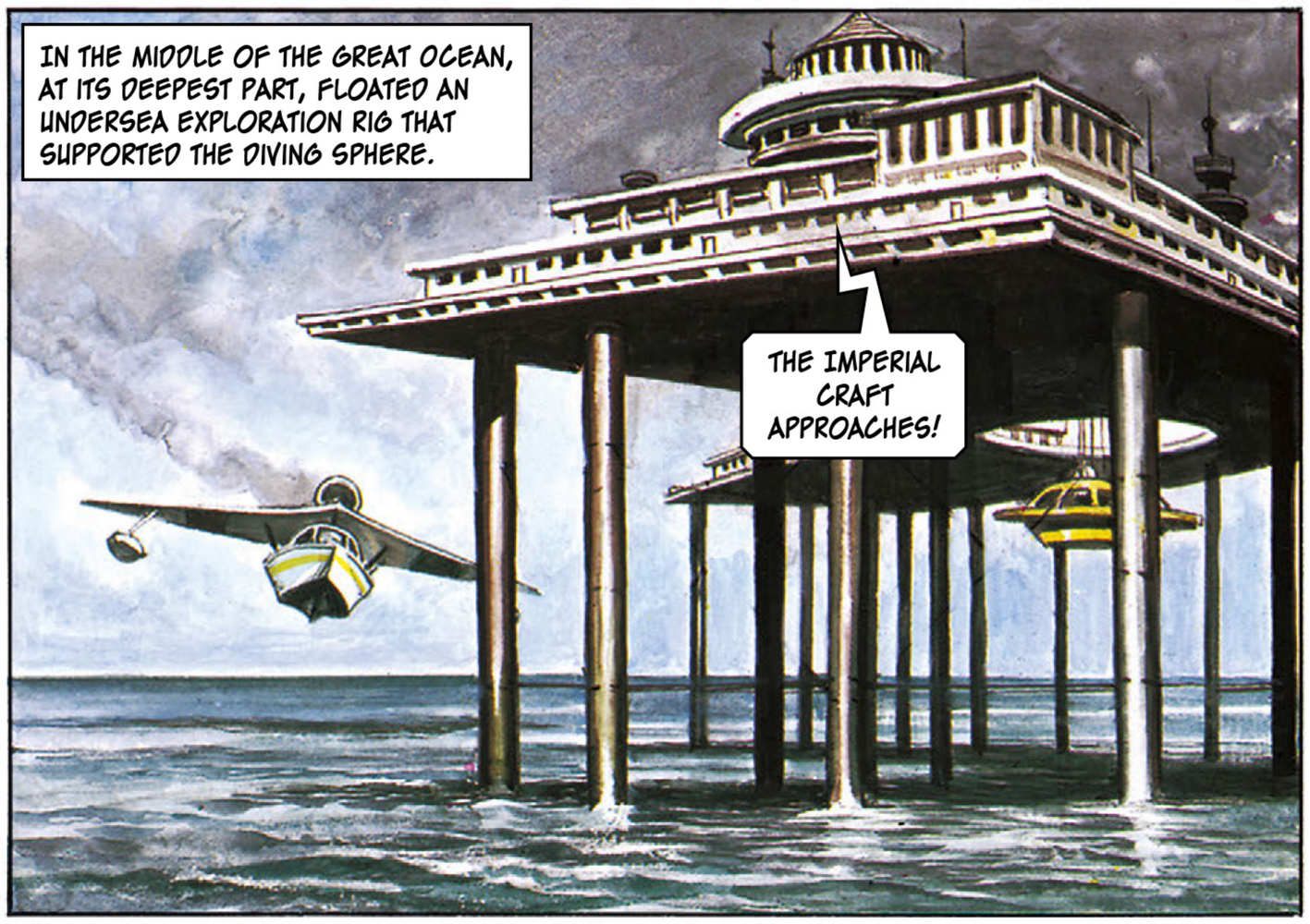
THE WRECKAGE OF HIS CRAFT WAS WASHED UP ON THE SHORE OF THE GREAT OCEAN A LUNAR MONTH LATER.

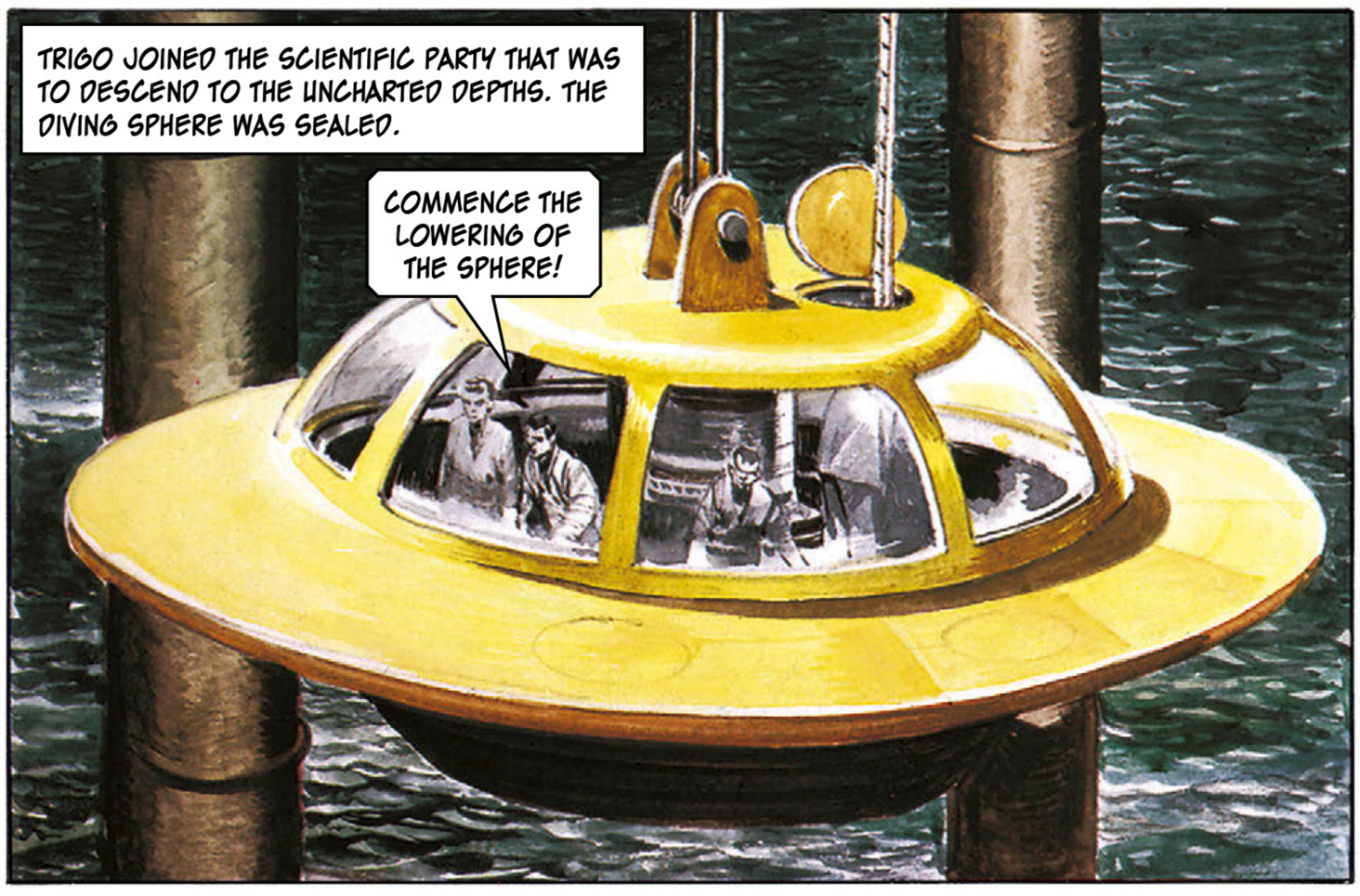

DURING THAT NIGHT, BRAG – NORMALLY A PEACEFUL SLEEPER – AWOKE FROM A DREADFUL NIGHTMARE.
SOMETHING TERRIBLE'S GOING TO HAPPEN TOMORROW! TRIGO'S IN AWFUL DANGER – I KNOW IT!

HE SOUGHT OUT HIS BROTHER, THE EMPEROR, EARLY NEXT MORNING.
BRAG, AS YOU KNOW, I'M MAKING A TRIAL DESCENT IN PERIC'S NEW DEEP SEA DIVING SPHERE TODAY AND...
NO! YOU MUSTN'T GO! I'VE HAD A PREMONITION OF DISASTER. A DREAM...

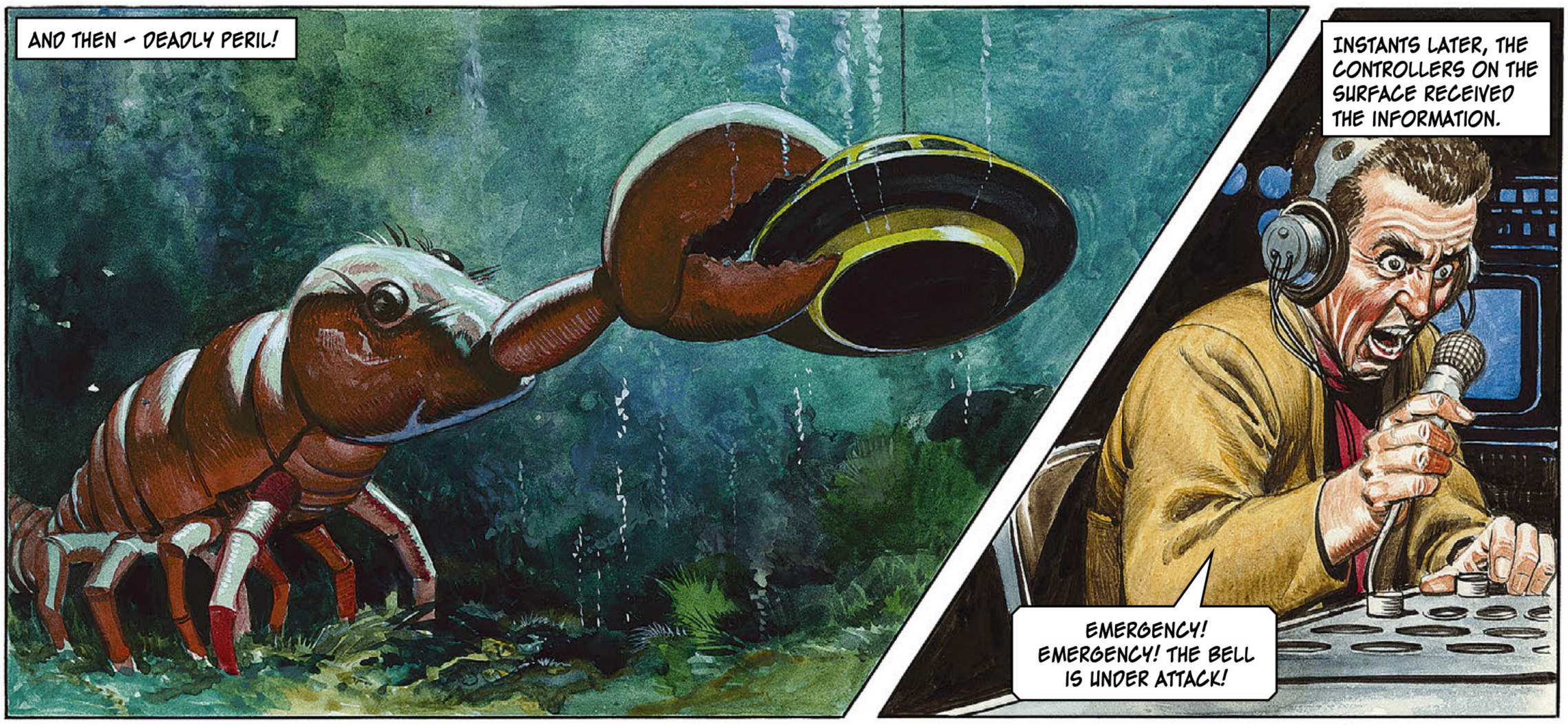
TRIGO LISTENED TO BRAG'S ACCOUNT OF HIS NIGHTMARE. THEN HE SMILED INDULGENTLY.
IT'S QUITE TOUCHING THE WAY YOU WORRY ABOUT MY SAFETY. I REALLY DO APPRECIATE IT, MY DEAR FELLOW, BUT IF YOU THINK I'M GOING TO CANCEL THE DESCENT ON ACCOUNT OF SOME SILLY DREAM...
SOMETHING TERRIBLE WILL HAPPEN TODAY. I KNOW IT!

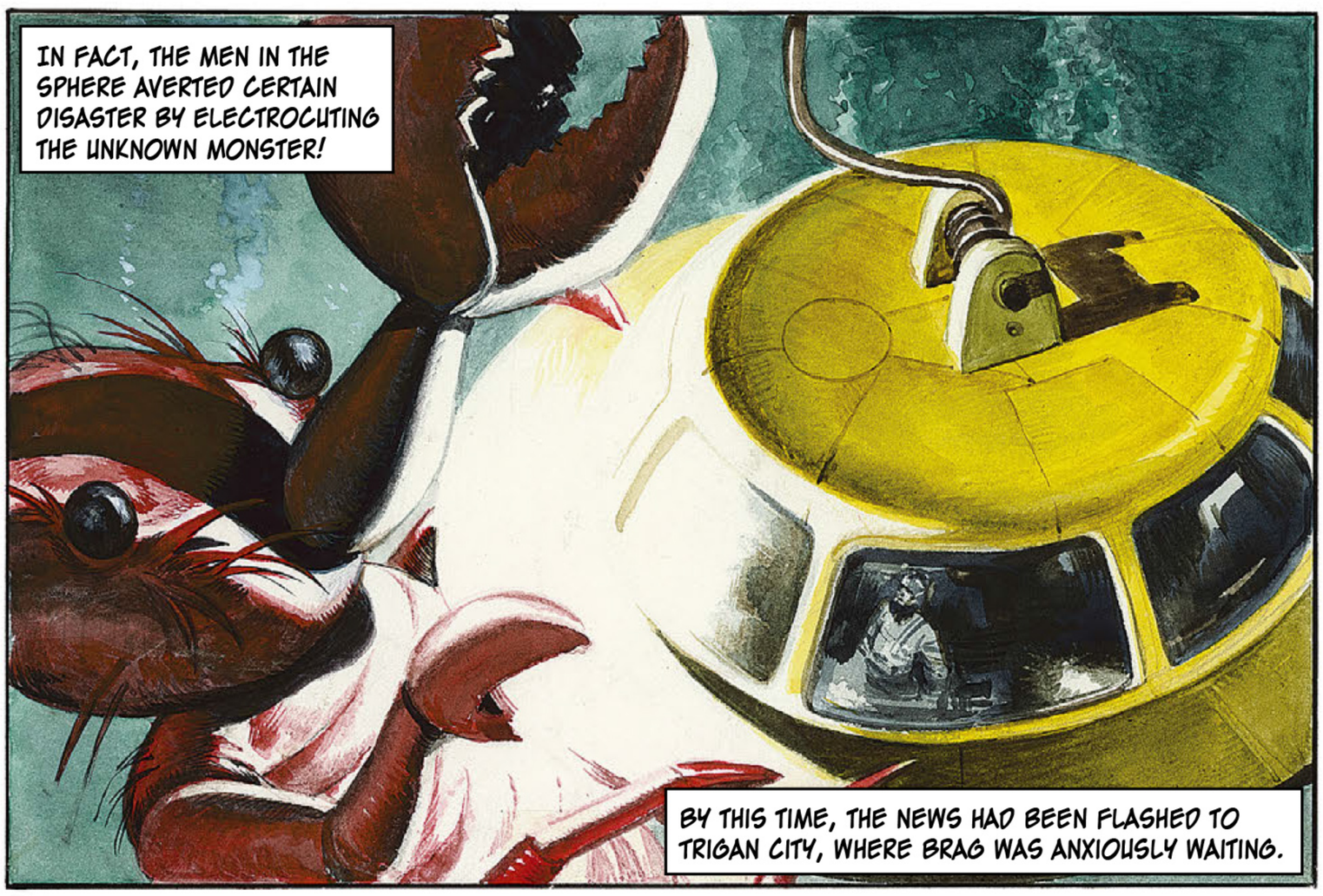

THE FAITHFUL BRAG WAS WATCHING FROM THE PALACE ROOF WHEN TRIGO'S AIR CRAFT SET OFF FOR THE RENDEZVOUS ON THE GREAT OCEAN.
I SHALL NEVER SET EYES ON HIM AGAIN – NEVER!


IN THE MIDDLE OF THE GREAT OCEAN, AT ITS DEEPEST PART, FLOATED AN UNDERSEA EXPLORATION RIG THAT SUPPORTED THE DIVING SPHERE.
THE IMPERIAL CRAFT APPROACHES!

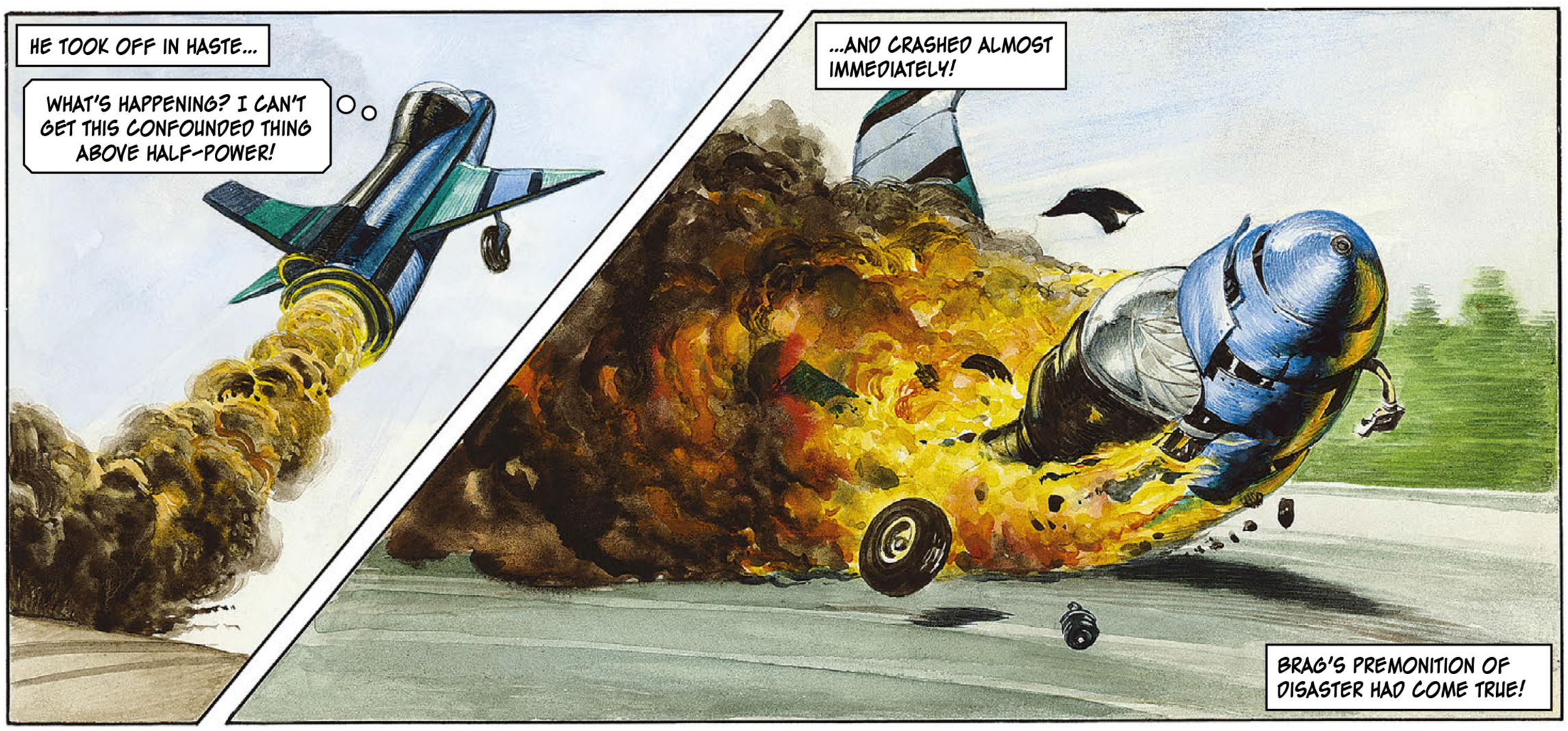

TRIGO JOINED THE SCIENTIFIC PARTY THAT WAS TO DESCEND TO THE UNCHARTED DEPTHS. THE DIVING SPHERE WAS SEALED.
COMMENCE THE LOWERING OF THE SPHERE!

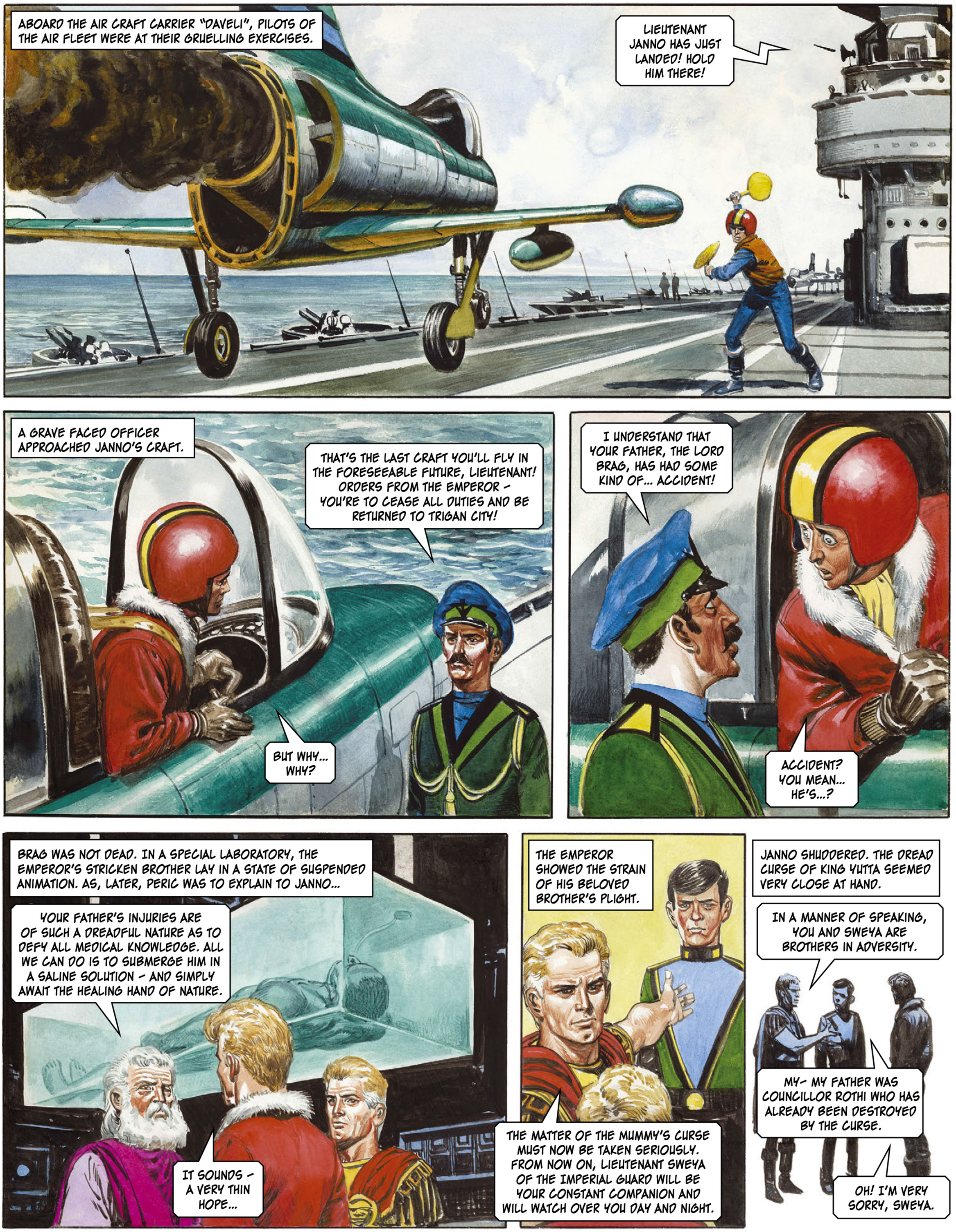
DOWN... DOWN... DOWN!

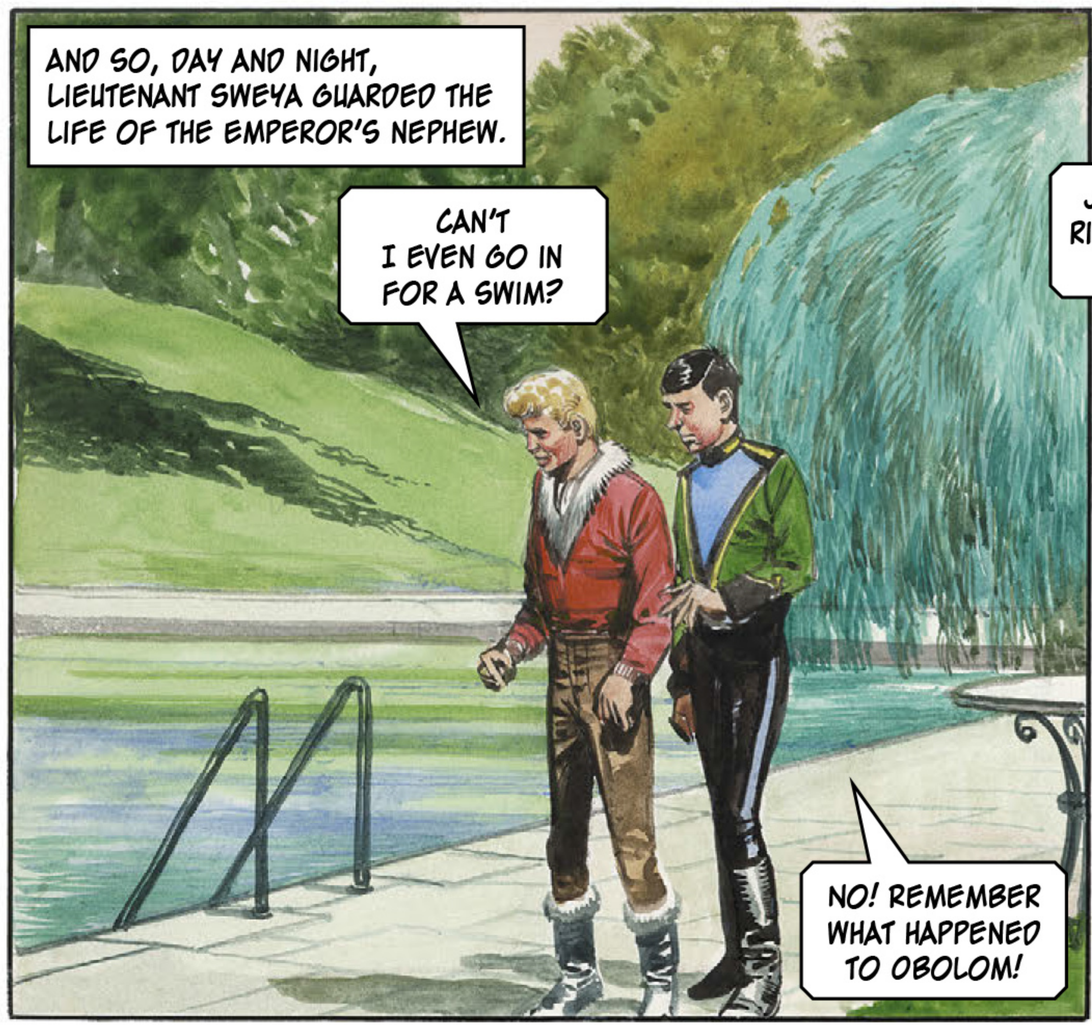

AND THEN – DEADLY PERIL!
INSTANTS LATER, THE CONTROLLERS ON THE SURFACE RECEIVED THE INFORMATION.
EMERGENCY! EMERGENCY! THE BELL IS UNDER ATTACK!

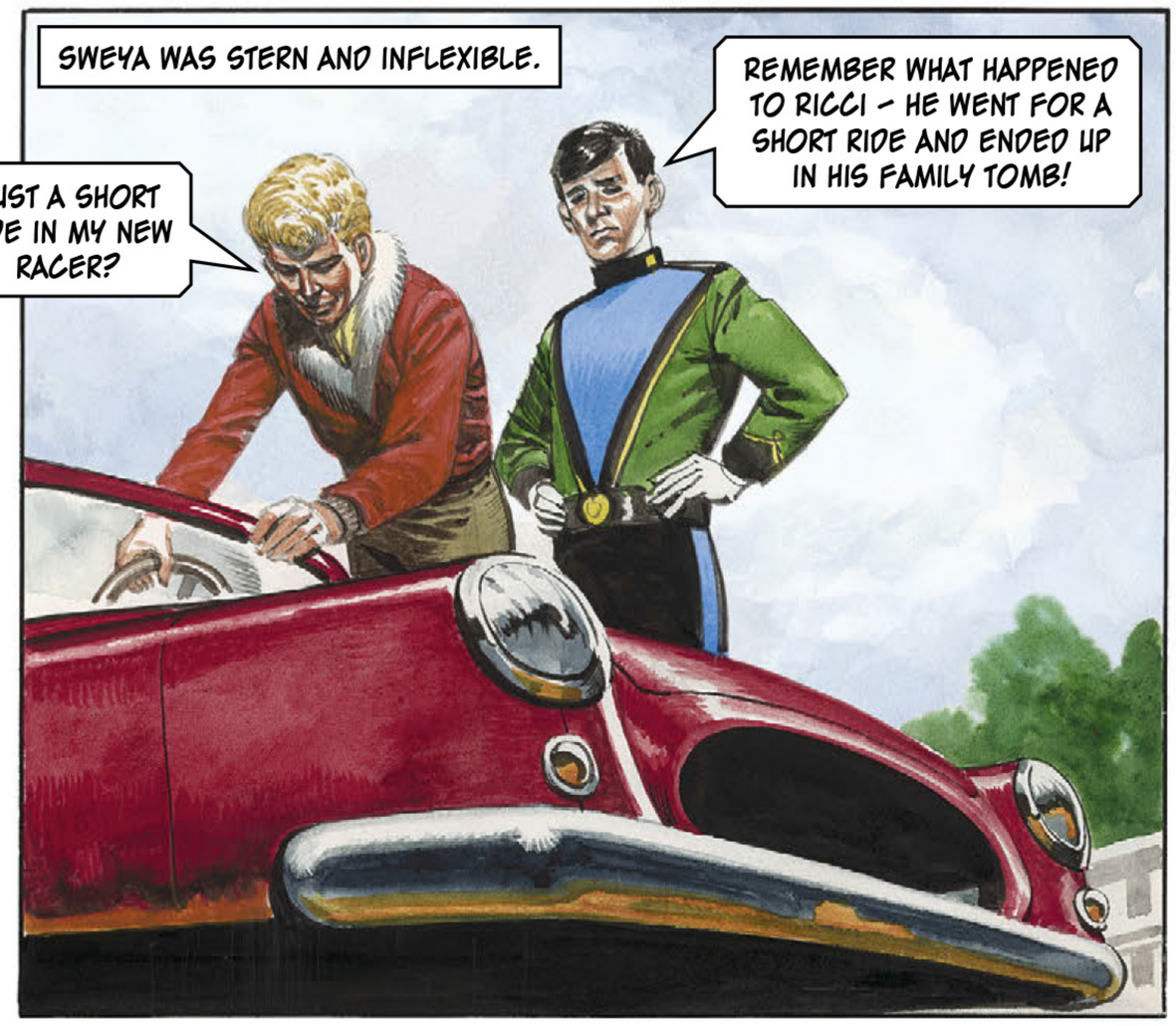

IN FACT, THE MEN IN THE SPHERE AVERTED CERTAIN DISASTER BY ELECTROCUTING THE UNKNOWN MONSTER!
BY THIS TIME, THE NEWS HAD BEEN FLASHED TO TRIGAN CITY, WHERE BRAG WAS ANXIOUSLY WAITING.

CONTACT THE LANDING STRIP AND TELL THEM TO HAVE MY PRIVATE AIR CRAFT READY AND WAITING FOR ME!
AT ONCE, LORD BRAG!


HE TOOK OFF IN HASTE...
WHAT'S HAPPENING? I CAN'T GET THIS CONFOUNDED THING ABOVE HALF-POWER!
...AND CRASHED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY!
BRAG'S PREMONITION OF DISASTER HAD COME TRUE!


ABOARD THE AIR CRAFT CARRIER "DAVELI", PILOTS OF THE AIR FLEET WERE AT THEIR GRUELLING EXERCISES.
LIEUTENANT JANNO HAS JUST LANDED! HOLD HIM THERE!
A GRAVE FACED OFFICER APPROACHED JANNO'S CRAFT.
THAT'S THE LAST CRAFT YOU'LL FLY IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, LIEUTENANT! ORDERS FROM THE EMPEROR – YOU'RE TO CEASE ALL DUTIES AND BE RETURNED TO TRIGAN CITY!
BUT WHY... WHY?
I UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR FATHER, THE LORD BRAG, HAS HAD SOME KIND OF... ACCIDENT!
ACCIDENT? YOU MEAN... HE'S...?
BRAG WAS NOT DEAD. IN A SPECIAL LABORATORY, THE EMPEROR'S STRICKEN BROTHER LAY IN A STATE OF SUSPENDED ANIMATION. AS, LATER, PERIC WAS TO EXPLAIN TO JANNO...
YOUR FATHER'S INJURIES ARE OF SUCH A DREADFUL NATURE AS TO DEFY ALL MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE. ALL WE CAN DO IS TO SUBMERGE HIM IN A SALINE SOLUTION – AND SIMPLY AWAIT THE HEALING HAND OF NATURE.
IT SOUNDS – A VERY THIN HOPE...
THE EMPEROR SHOWED THE STRAIN OF HIS BELOVED BROTHER'S PLIGHT.
THE MATTER OF THE MUMMY'S CURSE MUST NOW BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. FROM NOW ON, LIEUTENANT SWEYA OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD WILL BE YOUR CONSTANT COMPANION AND WILL WATCH OVER YOU DAY AND NIGHT.
JANNO SHUDDERED. THE DREAD CURSE OF KING YUTTA SEEMED VERY CLOSE AT HAND.
IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING, YOU AND SWEYA ARE BROTHERS IN ADVERSITY.
MY– MY FATHER WAS COUNCILLOR ROTHI WHO HAS ALREADY BEEN DESTROYED BY THE CURSE.
OH! I'M VERY SORRY, SWEYA.


AND SO, DAY AND NIGHT, LIEUTENANT SWEYA GUARDED THE LIFE OF THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW.
CAN'T I EVEN GO IN FOR A SWIM?
NO! REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED TO OBOLOM!


SWEYA WAS STERN AND INFLEXIBLE.
JUST A SHORT RIDE IN MY NEW RACER?
REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED TO RICCI – HE WENT FOR A SHORT RIDE AND ENDED UP IN HIS FAMILY TOMB!

THE TWO YOUNG OFFICERS WERE QUARTERED IN A SUITE OF ROOMS IN THE IMPERIAL PALACE. ONE NIGHT, AS JANNO WAS ABOUT TO RETIRE...
IS THAT YOU, SWEYA?

SUDDENLY... IT HAPPENED!
AAAAAH!

JANNO! WHAT IS IT? WHY DID YOU CALL OUT?
WHERE DID HE GO? THE DEMON WHO THREW THE AXE AT ME!

THEY SEARCHED THE SUITE. THERE WAS NO ONE ELSE THERE!
SOMEONE WAS HERE! SOMEONE OF FLESH AND BLOOD! SOMEONE WITH ENOUGH HATRED TO WANT TO MAKE AN END OF ME!
AAAAAH! BY ALL THE STARS! LOOK DOWN HERE, JANNO!

JANNO PEERED DOWN INTO A SHADOWY COURTYARD – IN TIME TO SEE A STRANGE FIGURE FLIT FROM SIGHT.
OH NO! IT'S... THE MUMMY OF KING YUTTA!

WITHOUT AN INSTANT'S HESITATION, JANNO HURLED HIMSELF THROUGH THE WINDOW.
JANNO! NO!
BE HE LIVING OR DEAD, I'M GOING AFTER HIM!

WITH SWEYA'S SHOUT RINGING IN HIS EARS, HE LANDED IN THE COURTYARD.
KING YUTTA'S MUMMY!

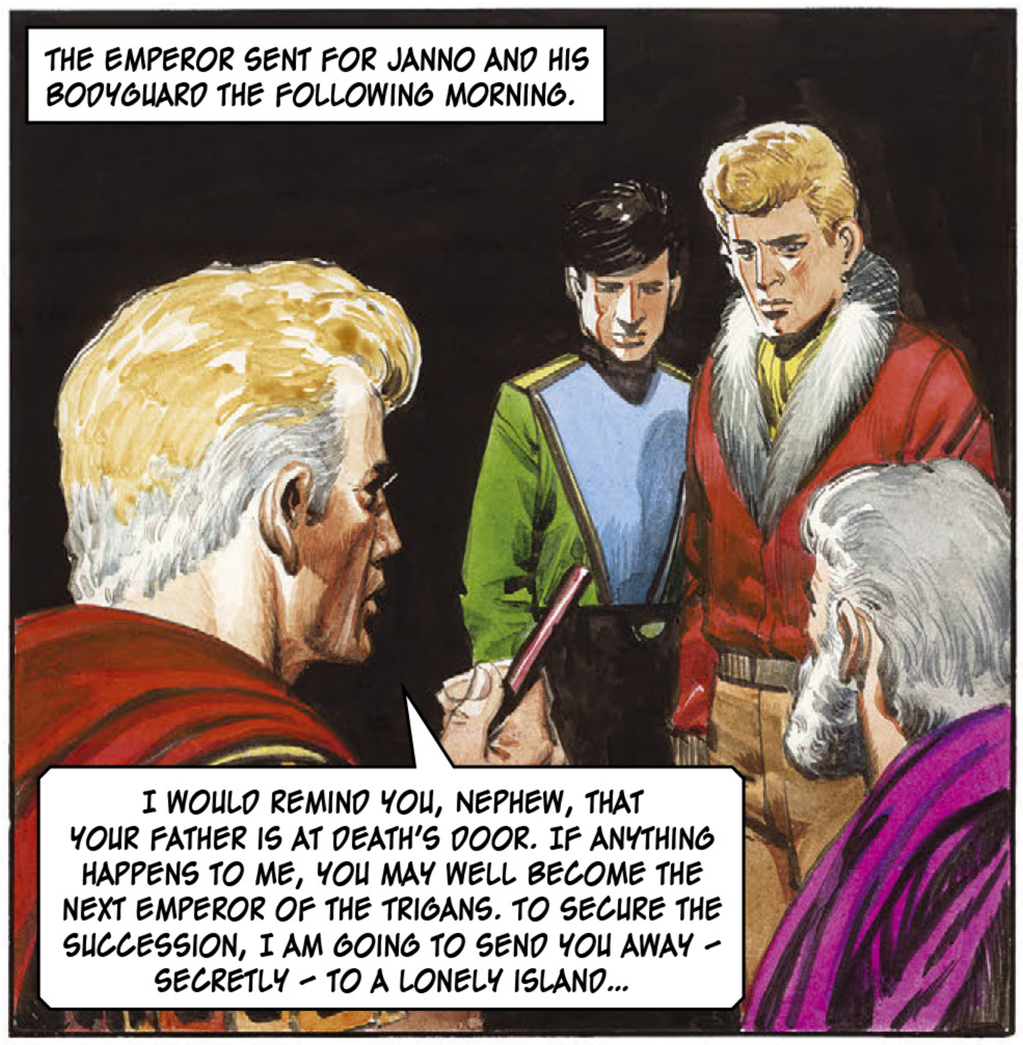
A FEW SWIFT STRIDES – AN ATHLETIC LEAP – AND HIS HANDS CONNECTED WITH SOLID FLESH AND BONE!
SWEYA! COME QUICKLY! I'VE GOT HIM!
EEAAGH!

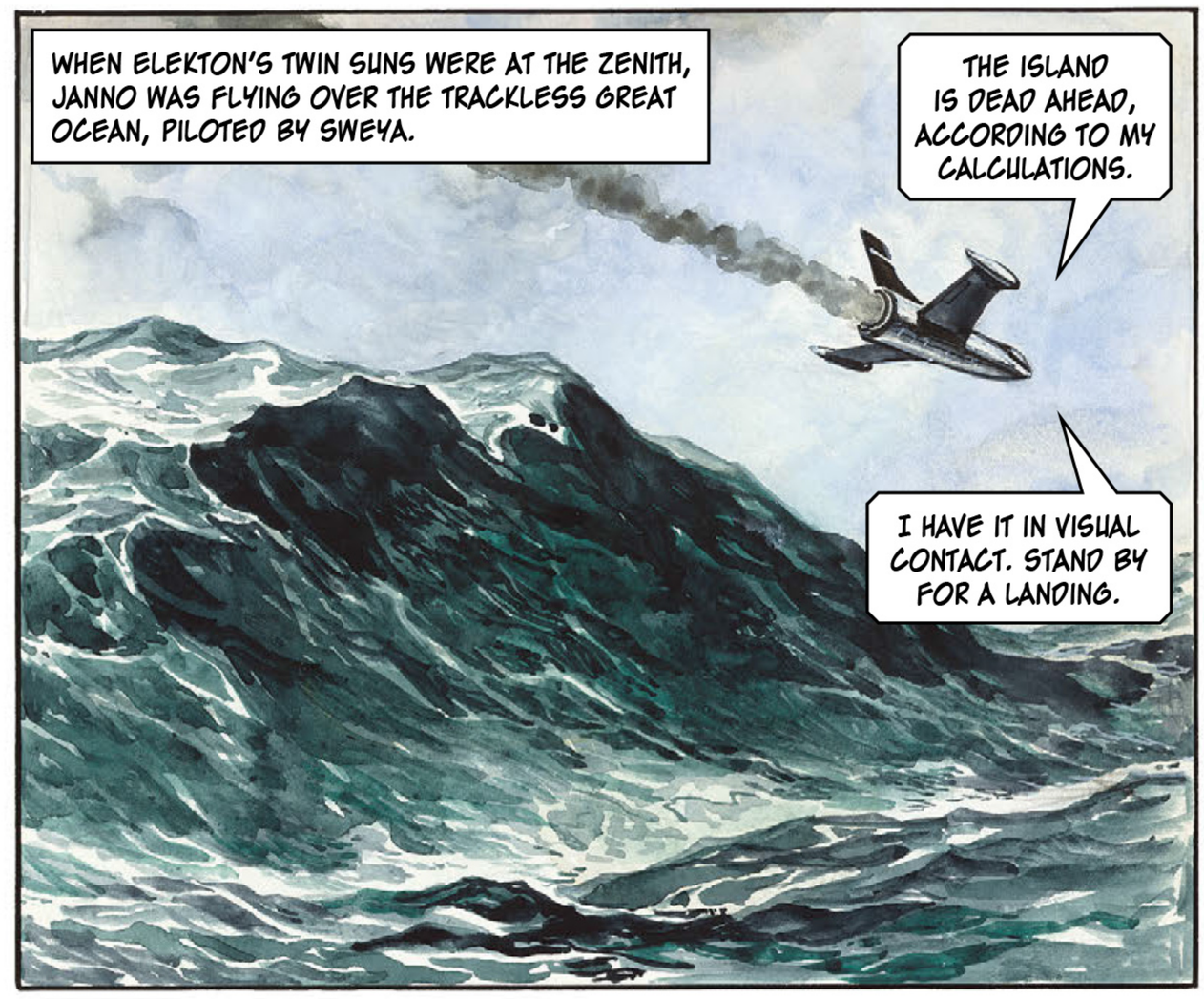
AND THEN – JANNO'S WORLD DISSOLVED IN A SEA OF PAIN AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS.
UUUUGGH!

WHEN HE OPENED HIS EYES AGAIN, HE WAS NOT ALONE.
WHAT HAPPENED? WE HEARD LORD JANNO CRY OUT!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, JANNO?
SOMEONE... SOMETHING... STRUCK ME ON THE HEAD FROM BEHIND.

THAT WAS A FOOLHARDY THING YOU DID! IF YOU DON'T CARE FOR YOURSELF, YOU MIGHT GIVE SOME THOUGHT FOR ME! I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR SAFETY – WITH MY HEAD AS FORFEIT!
I'M SORRY, SWEYA. BUT I HAD MY HANDS ON HIM – AND I'D SWEAR HE'S LIVING FLESH AND BLOOD LIKE YOU AND ME!

WHAT'S MORE, HE CRIED OUT... AND DO YOU KNOW? I'D STAKE MY LIFE I'VE HEARD THAT VOICE BEFORE!


THE EMPEROR SENT FOR JANNO AND HIS BODYGUARD THE FOLLOWING MORNING.
I WOULD REMIND YOU, NEPHEW, THAT YOUR FATHER IS AT DEATH'S DOOR. IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO ME, YOU MAY WELL BECOME THE NEXT EMPEROR OF THE TRIGANS. TO SECURE THE SUCCESSION, I AM GOING TO SEND YOU AWAY – SECRETLY – TO A LONELY ISLAND...


WHEN ELEKTON'S TWIN SUNS WERE AT THE ZENITH, JANNO WAS FLYING OVER THE TRACKLESS GREAT OCEAN, PILOTED BY SWEYA.
THE ISLAND IS DEAD AHEAD, ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS.
I HAVE IT IN VISUAL CONTACT. STAND BY FOR A LANDING.

THE ISLAND HAD BEEN WELL-CHOSEN, BEING FAR FROM NORMAL AIR AND SEA ROUTES.
NOT BAD. WE'LL BE QUITE COMFORTABLE HERE FOR A LUNAR MONTH OR SO.

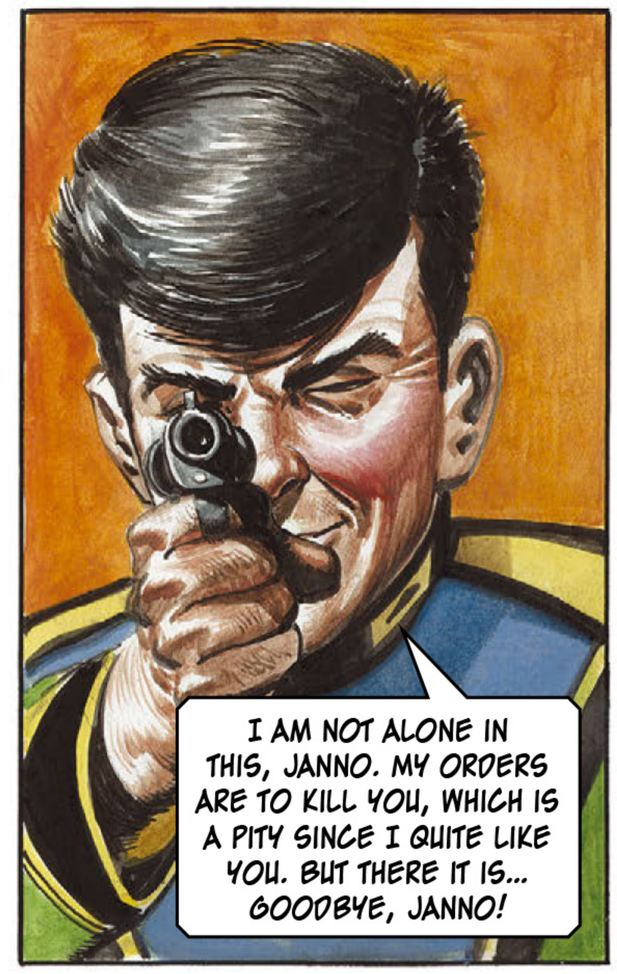
WHEN THEY HAD LANDED...
I'LL HAVE A SCOUT AROUND OUR NEW HOME.
I'LL JOIN YOU JUST AS SOON AS I'VE UNLOADED THESE PROVISIONS.

SOME TIME LATER, AT THE FAR SIDE OF THE SMALL ISLAND, A MOVING SHADOW FELL ACROSS JANNO. HE TURNED...
WHO'S THAT?

YOU!
SUDDENLY FACE-TO-FACE WITH DEATH, JANNO FELT NO FEAR – ONLY SHOCKED SURPRISE!

ABOVE THE MUZZLE OF THE LEVELLED WEAPON, JANNO SAW THE EYES THAT HE KNEW SO WELL.
SO YOU'RE THE ONE BEHIND IT ALL! YOU, WHO WERE APPOINTED MY BODYGUARD, HAVE BEEN TRYING TO DESTROY ME ALL THIS TIME.

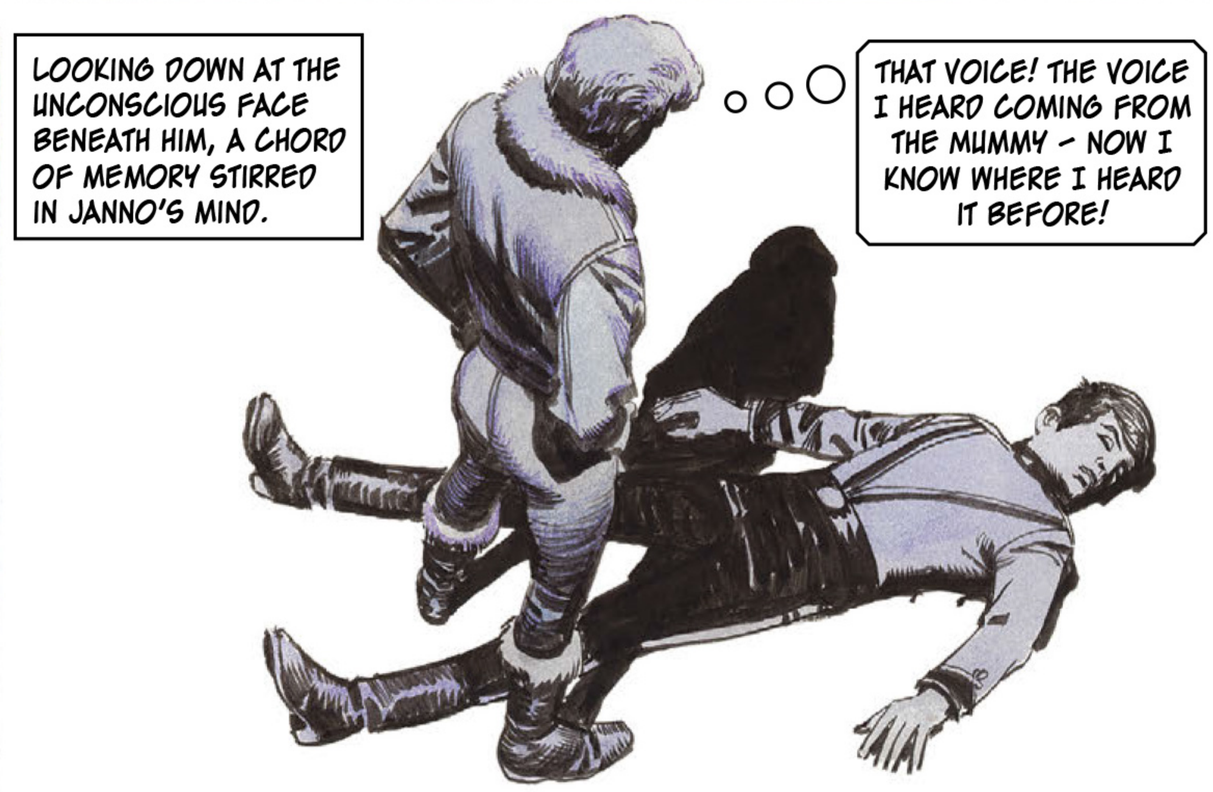
A QUESTION SPRANG TO JANNO'S LIPS – AND SWEYA GAVE A CONTEMPTUOUS LAUGH.
AND WHAT OF KING YUTTA'S MUMMY?
THE MUMMY? HAH!


I AM NOT ALONE IN THIS, JANNO. MY ORDERS ARE TO KILL YOU, WHICH IS A PITY SINCE I QUITE LIKE YOU. BUT THERE IT IS... GOODBYE, JANNO!

AT THE PRECISE MOMENT THAT HE SAW SWEYA'S FINGER TIGHTEN ON THE TRIGGER, JANNO THREW HIMSELF SIDEWAYS.

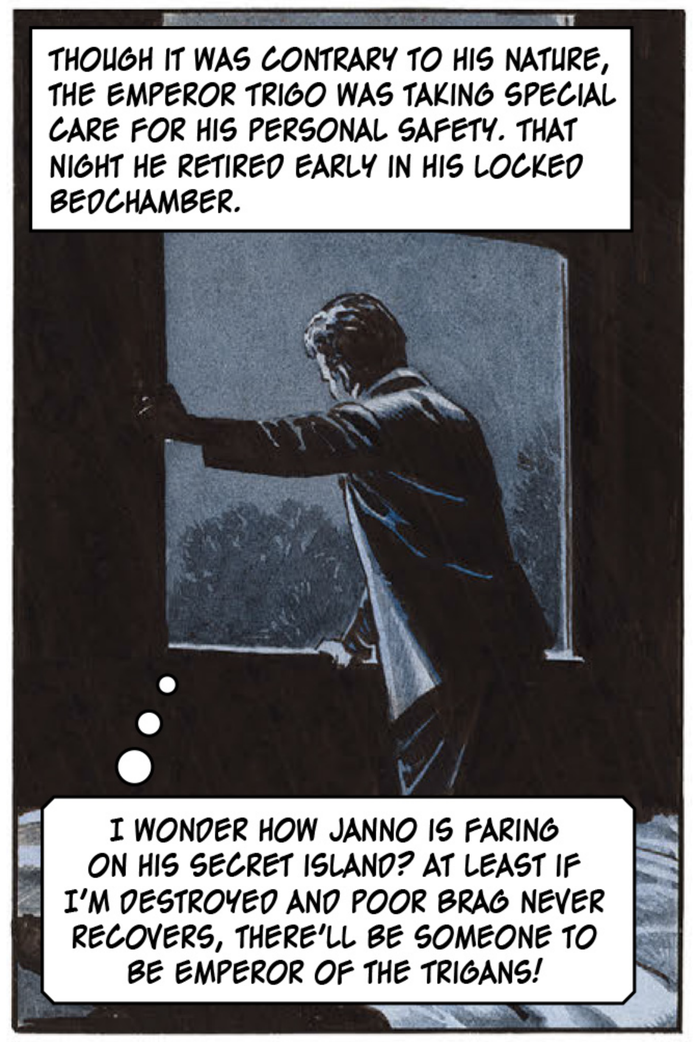
AND THEN...
AAAAGH!

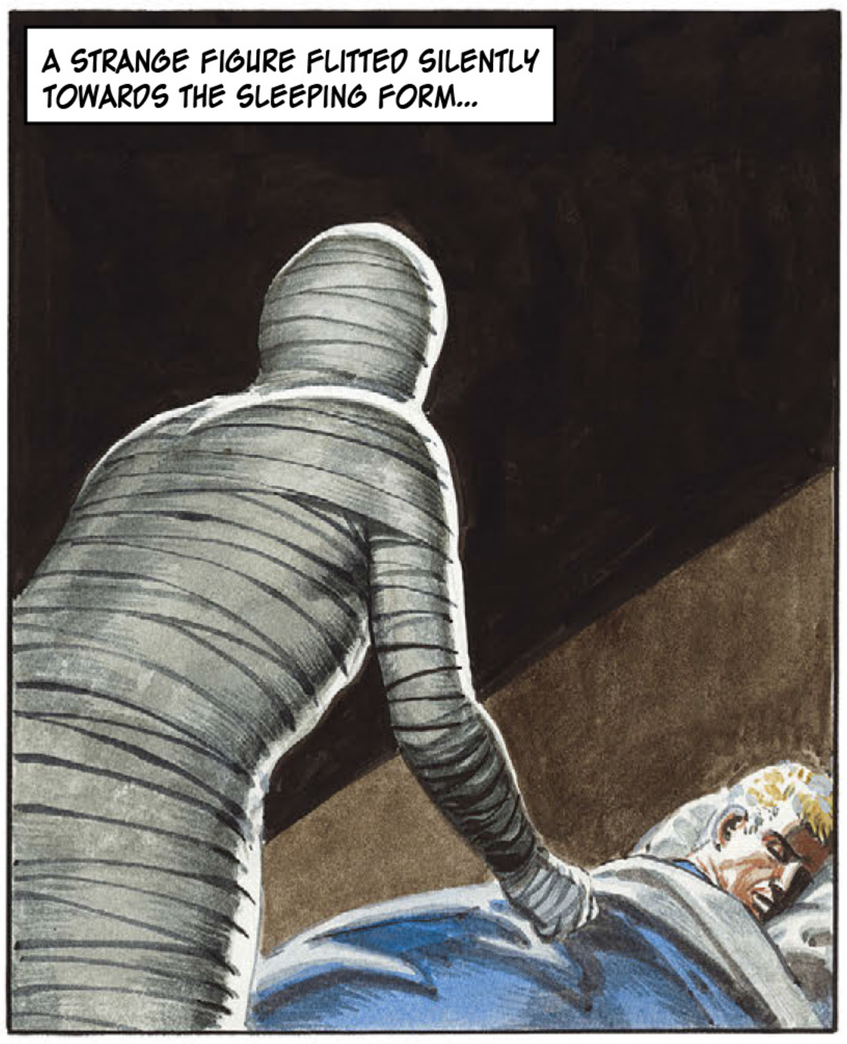
...HE LEAPT INTO ACTION!
UUUHH!

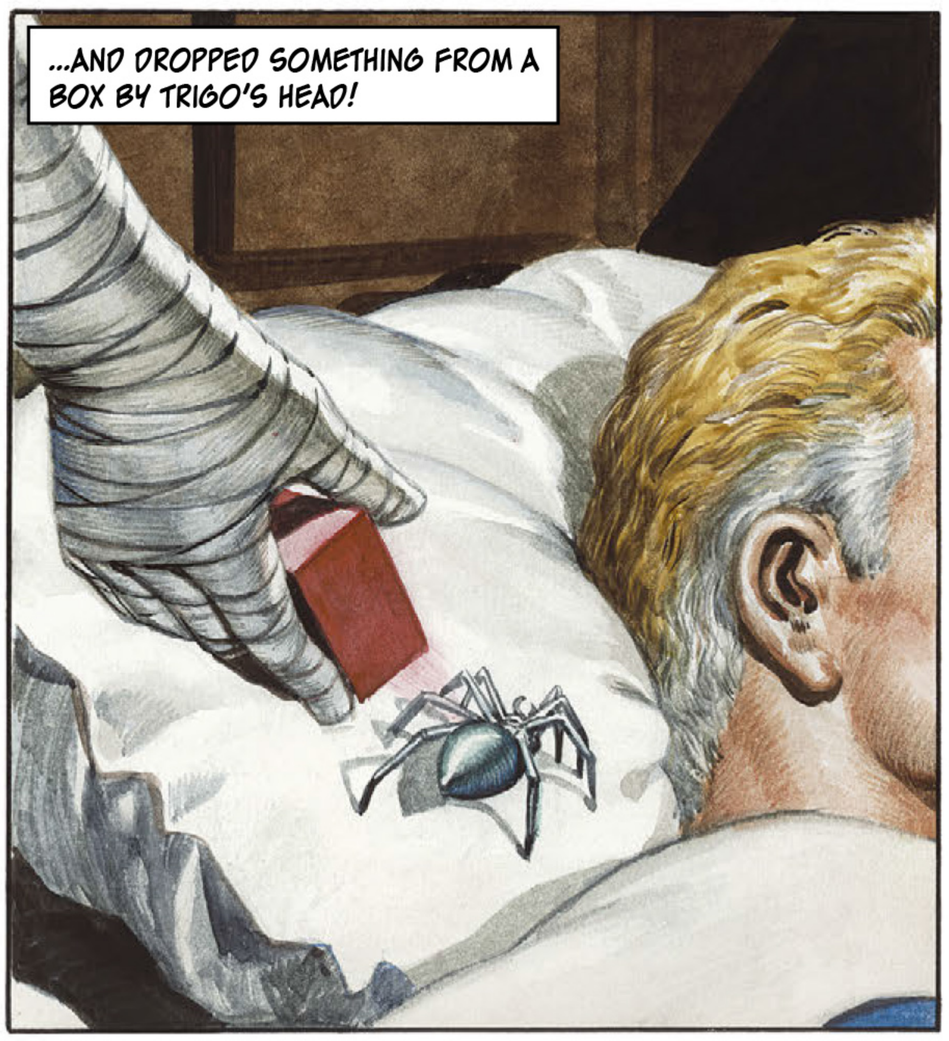

LOOKING DOWN AT THE UNCONSCIOUS FACE BENEATH HIM, A CHORD OF MEMORY STIRRED IN JANNO'S MIND.
THAT VOICE! THE VOICE I HEARD COMING FROM THE MUMMY – NOW I KNOW WHERE I HEARD IT BEFORE!

MOMENTS LATER, HE WAS RISING SKYWARDS ABOVE THE ISLAND.

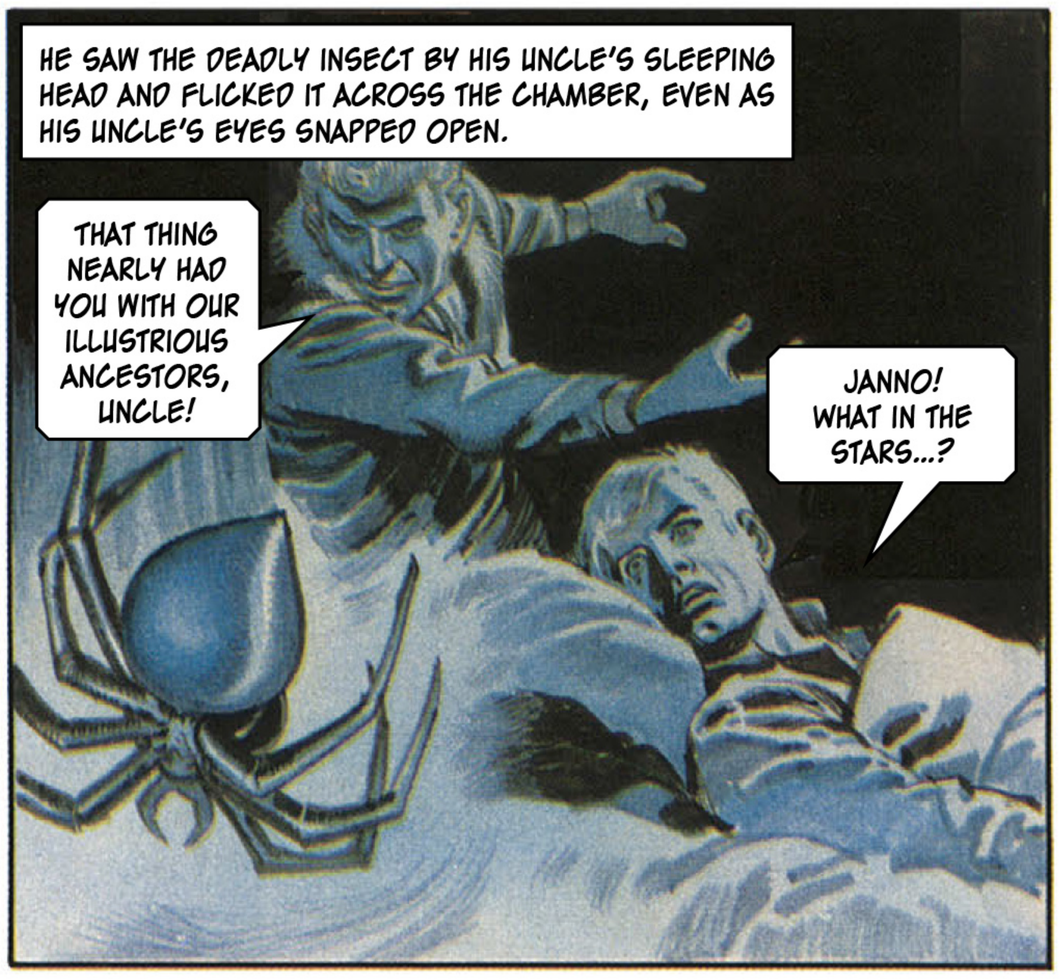
I'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO UNCLE TRIGO AND WARN HIM! BY ALL THE STARS, I HOPE I'M NOT TOO LATE!



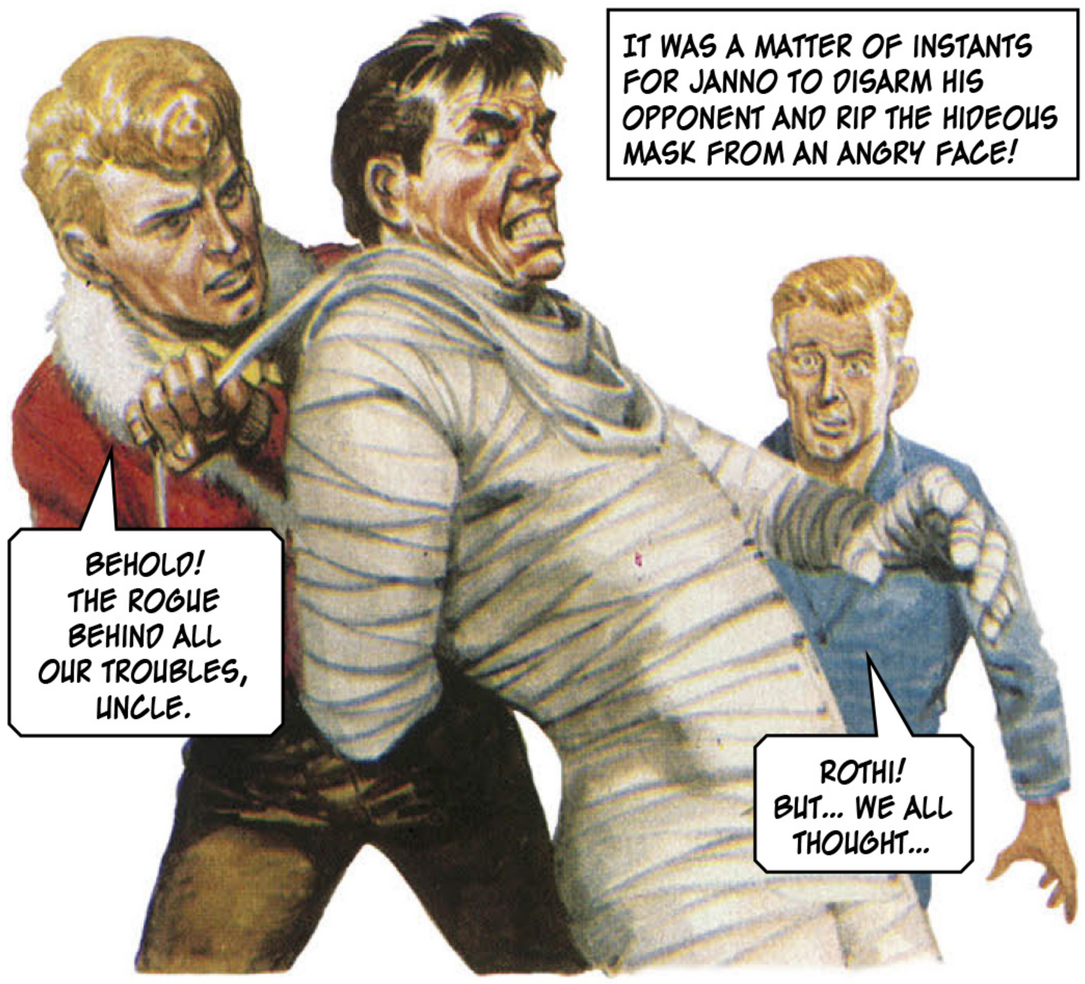


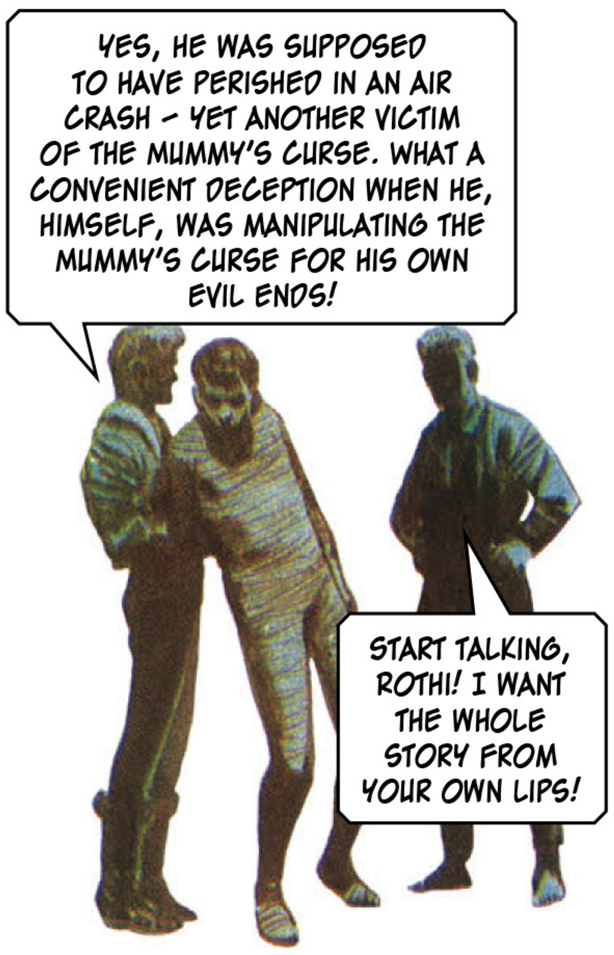


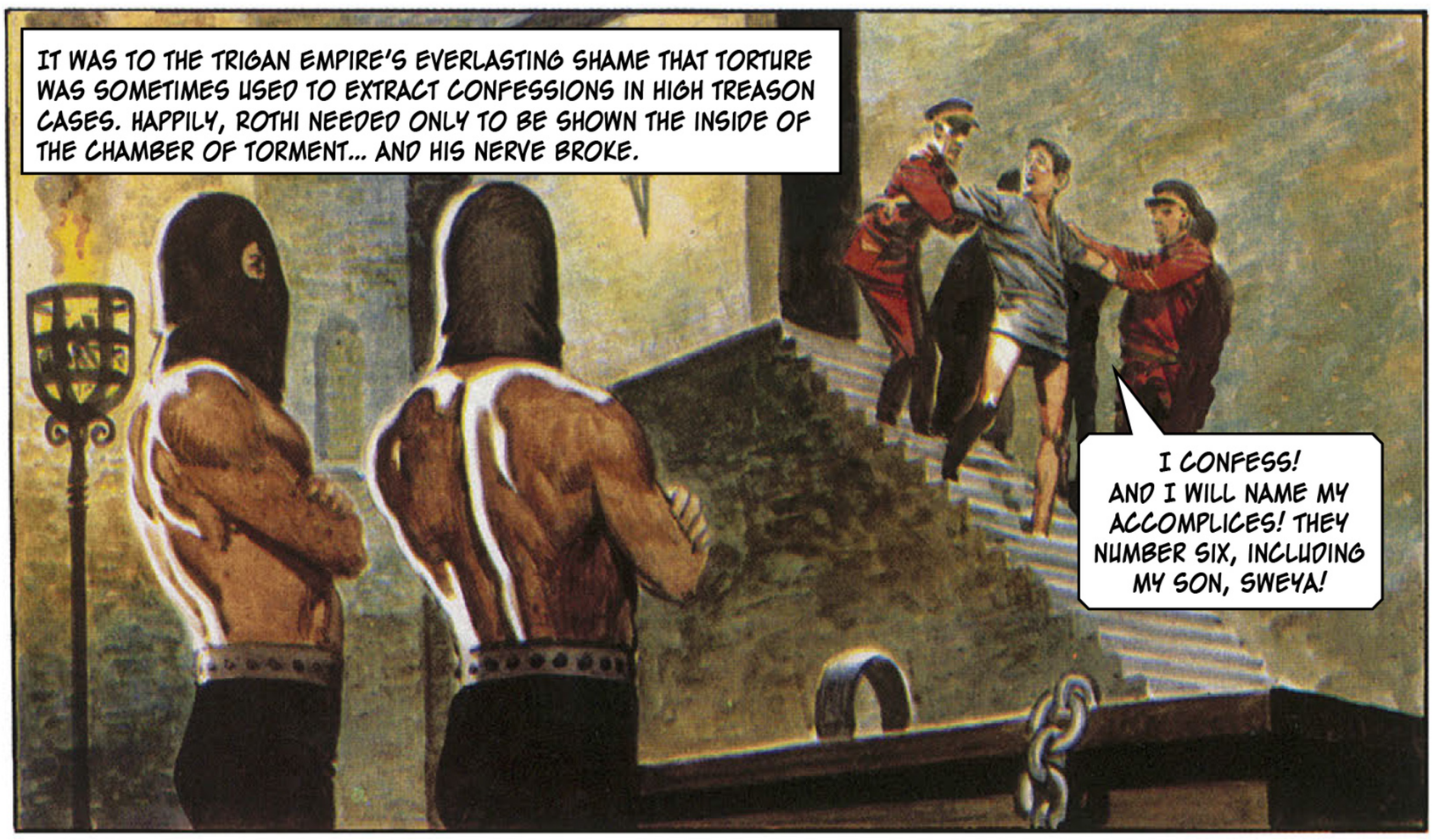
WITH A RENDING CRASH, JANNO BURST IN THROUGH THE WINDOW OF THE IMPERIAL BEDCHAMBER! THE STRANGE FIGURE BY TRIGO'S COUCH BACKED AWAY IN ALARM.
HAH!

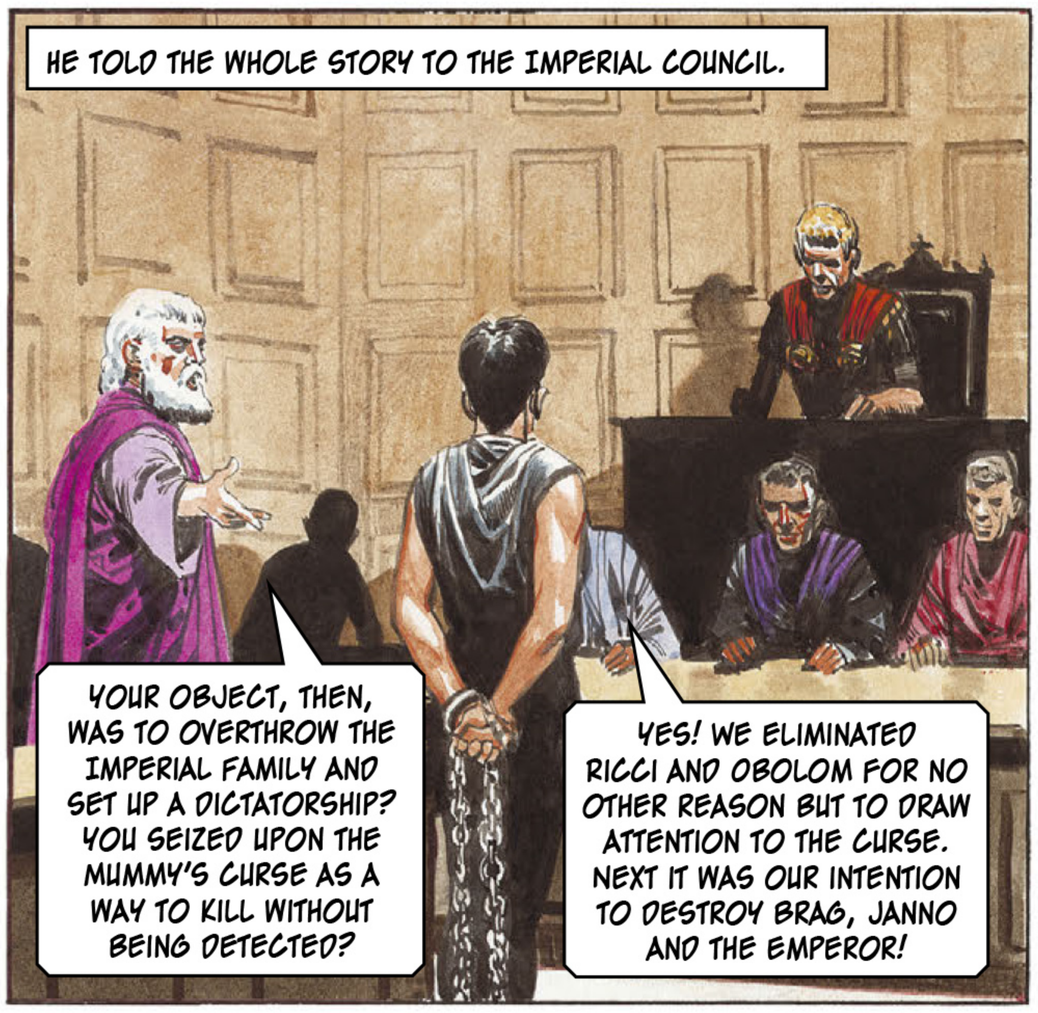

HE SAW THE DEADLY INSECT BY HIS UNCLE'S SLEEPING HEAD AND FLICKED IT ACROSS THE CHAMBER, EVEN AS HIS UNCLE'S EYES SNAPPED OPEN.
THAT THING NEARLY HAD YOU WITH OUR ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS, UNCLE!
JANNO! WHAT IN THE STARS...?

HE TURNED ON THE STRANGE FIGURE AS A WEAPON APPEARED IN A BANDAGED HAND...
SO! WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT THE MUMMY OF THE LONG-DEPARTED KING YUTTA HAD TO DESCEND TO THE USE OF FIREARMS!
TEN THOUSAND CURSES ON YOU, IMPERIAL BRAT!

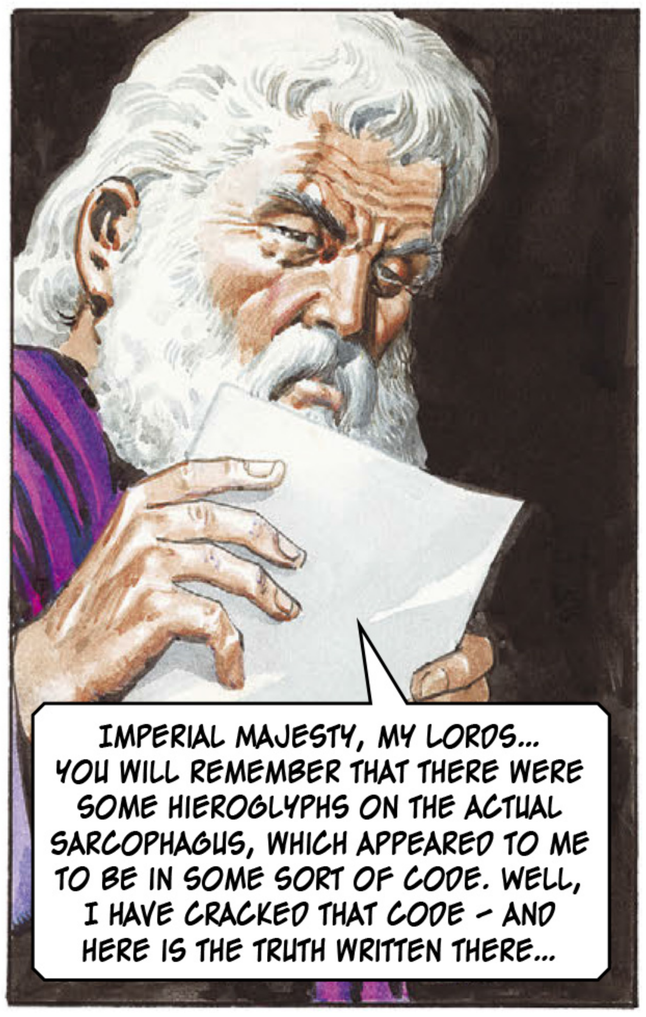

IT WAS A MATTER OF INSTANTS FOR JANNO TO DISARM HIS OPPONENT AND RIP THE HIDEOUS MASK FROM AN ANGRY FACE!
BEHOLD! THE ROGUE BEHIND ALL OUR TROUBLES, UNCLE.
ROTHI! BUT... WE ALL THOUGHT...


YES, HE WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE PERISHED IN AN AIR CRASH – YET ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE MUMMY'S CURSE. WHAT A CONVENIENT DECEPTION WHEN HE, HIMSELF, WAS MANIPULATING THE MUMMY'S CURSE FOR HIS OWN EVIL ENDS!
START TALKING, ROTHI! I WANT THE WHOLE STORY FROM YOUR OWN LIPS!

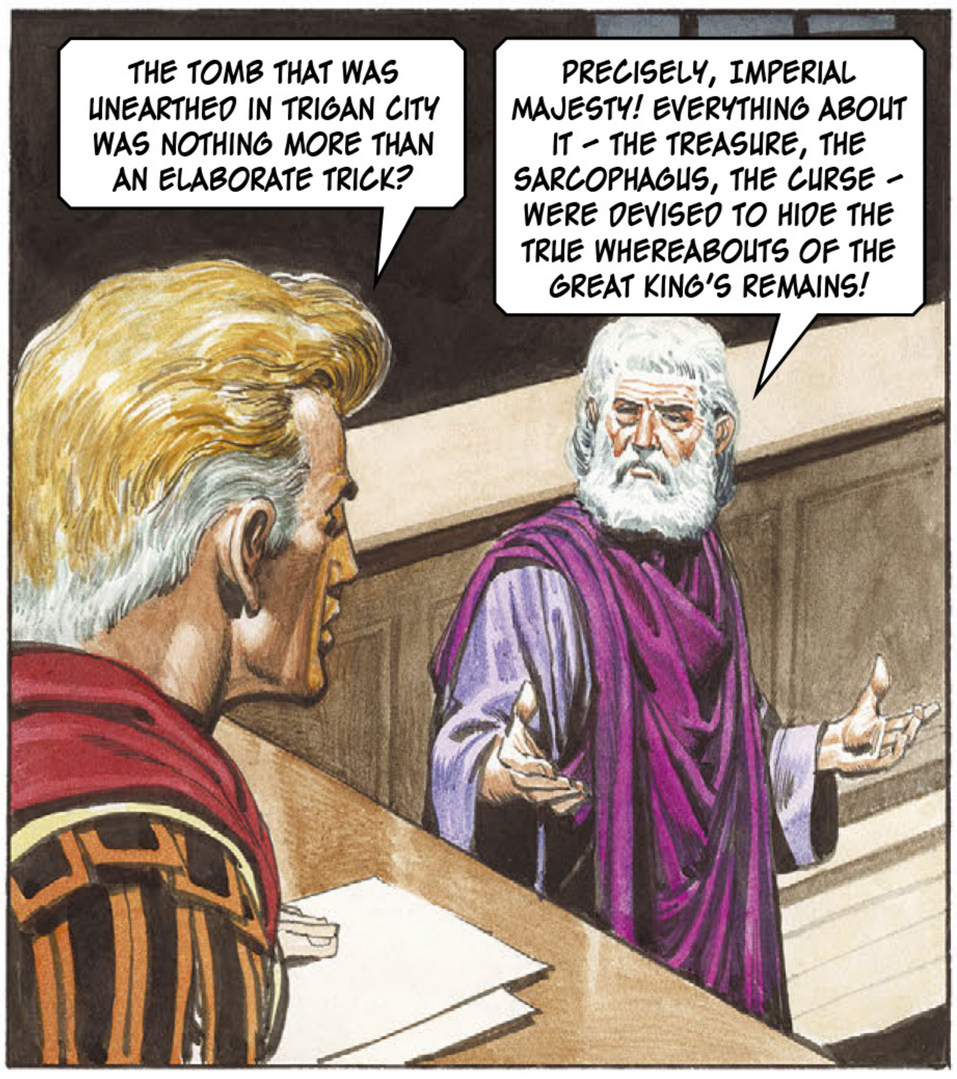

IT WAS TO THE TRIGAN EMPIRE'S EVERLASTING SHAME THAT TORTURE WAS SOMETIMES USED TO EXTRACT CONFESSIONS IN HIGH TREASON CASES. HAPPILY, ROTHI NEEDED ONLY TO BE SHOWN THE INSIDE OF THE CHAMBER OF TORMENT... AND HIS NERVE BROKE.
I CONFESS! AND I WILL NAME MY ACCOMPLICES! THEY NUMBER SIX, INCLUDING MY SON, SWEYA!


HE TOLD THE WHOLE STORY TO THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL.
YOUR OBJECT, THEN, WAS TO OVERTHROW THE IMPERIAL FAMILY AND SET UP A DICTATORSHIP? YOU SEIZED UPON THE MUMMY'S CURSE AS A WAY TO KILL WITHOUT BEING DETECTED?
YES! WE ELIMINATED RICCI AND OBOLOM FOR NO OTHER REASON BUT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE CURSE. NEXT IT WAS OUR INTENTION TO DESTROY BRAG, JANNO AND THE EMPEROR!

THEN PERIC SAID A VERY STRANGE THING...
WHAT YOU WERE NOT AWARE OF, HOWEVER, WAS THAT THERE IS NO MUMMY – AND NO CURSE!
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY, PERIC?


IMPERIAL MAJESTY, MY LORDS... YOU WILL REMEMBER THAT THERE WERE SOME HIEROGLYPHS ON THE ACTUAL SARCOPHAGUS, WHICH APPEARED TO ME TO BE IN SOME SORT OF CODE. WELL, I HAVE CRACKED THAT CODE – AND HERE IS THE TRUTH WRITTEN THERE...

EVERYONE PRESENT SAW, IN HIS MIND'S EYE, THE SCENE AS IT MUST HAVE TAKEN PLACE COUNTLESS LUNAR YEARS BEFORE...
"... AFTER THE FALSE TOMB HAS BEEN SEALED, THE LORD OF THE SKIES AND THE SOVEREIGN OF THE STARS WILL BE TAKEN TO SEA IN A GREAT SHIP AND HIS BODY WILL BE LAID TO REST IN THE BOSOM OF THE GREAT OCEAN."


THE TOMB THAT WAS UNEARTHED IN TRIGAN CITY WAS NOTHING MORE THAN AN ELABORATE TRICK?
PRECISELY, IMPERIAL MAJESTY! EVERYTHING ABOUT IT – THE TREASURE, THE SARCOPHAGUS, THE CURSE – WERE DEVISED TO HIDE THE TRUE WHEREABOUTS OF THE GREAT KING'S REMAINS!

SO ENDED THE SAGA OF THE MUMMY'S CURSE. ROTHI AND HIS ACCOMPLICES WERE PUNISHED AND BRAG MADE A COMPLETE RECOVERY FROM HIS INJURIES.
WE DESPAIRED FOR YOUR LIFE, FATHER.
TAKES MORE THAN AN AIR CRASH TO FINISH ME.

BESIDES, WITH ME AND YOUR UNCLE TRIGO OUT OF THE WAY, THE TRIGANS WOULD HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH YOU AS THEIR EMPEROR! AND WE COULDN'T ALLOW THAT!

XXXVII

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

THE LOST YEARS

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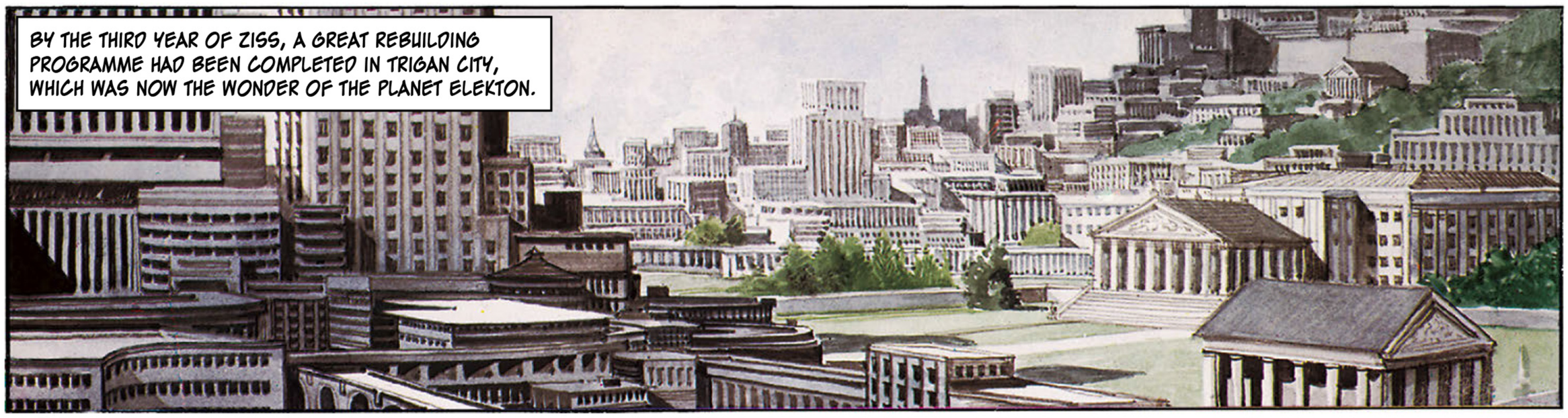
2nd December 1972 – 10th February 1973

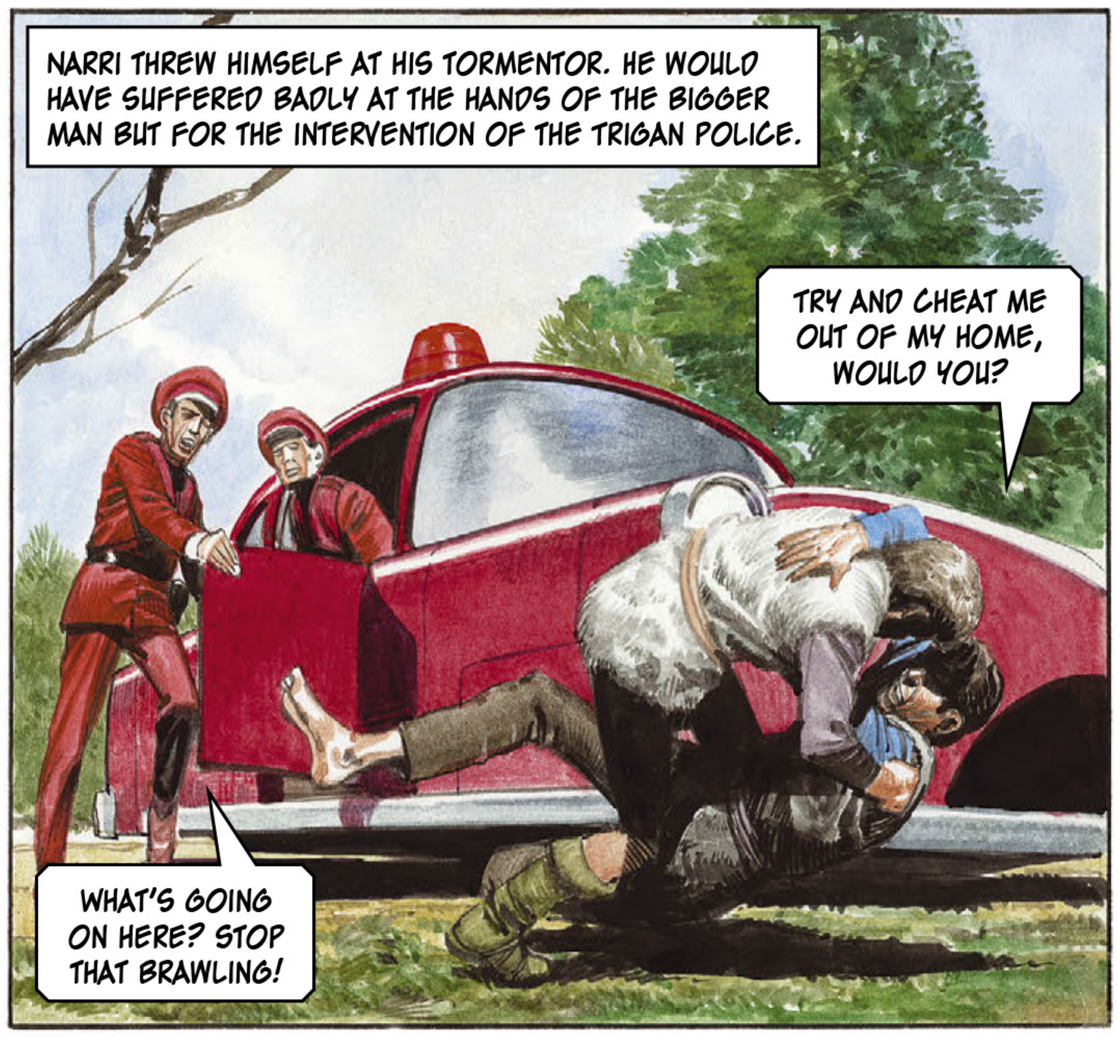


THE WRETCHED GLEBE-HERD SPENT MANY DAYS SEARCHING FOR HIS FLOCK – BUT TO NO AVAIL. IN THE END, HE RETURNED HOME. A TERRIBLE SHOCK AWAITED HIM...

EVERYTHING ABOUT HIS WRETCHED HOVEL WAS STRANGELY CHANGED!
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE PLACE?
WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE STARING AT, HEY?

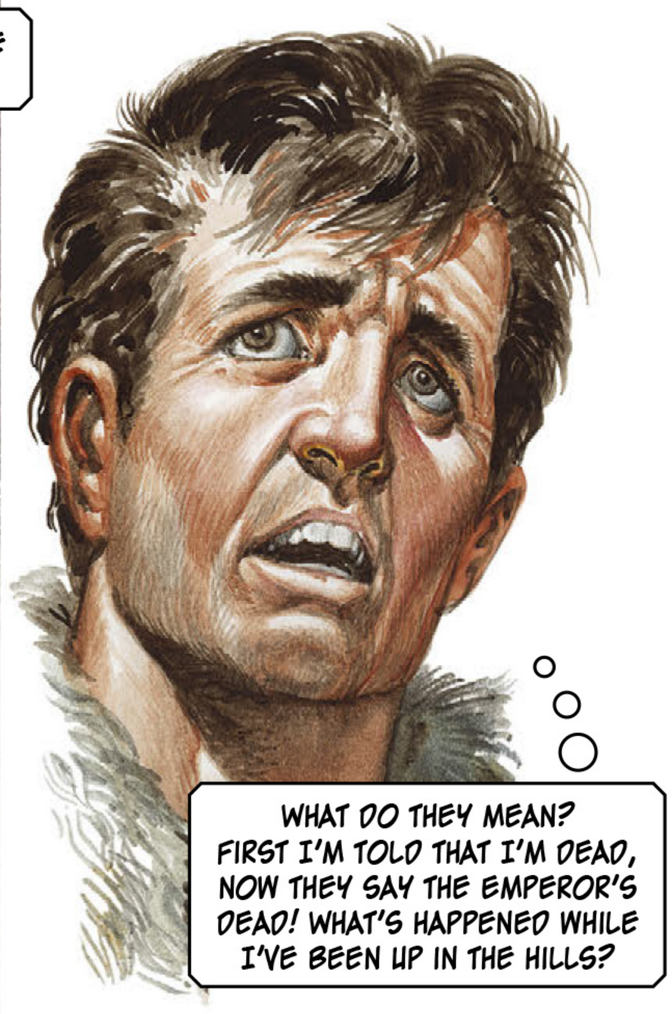
I'M NARRI, THE GLEBE-HERO, AND I WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING TO MY HOME!
YOUR HOME? WHAT TRICK ARE YOU TRYING TO PLAY? NARRI THE GLEBE-HERO AND HIS FAMILY DIED THREE LUNAR YEARS AGO AND I'VE LIVED HERE EVER SINCE!

I'LL TEACH YOU TO TRY AND PLAY TRICKS WITH ROCCO, YOU LYING SCOUNDREL!
AAARGH!


NARRI THREW HIMSELF AT HIS TORMENTOR. HE WOULD HAVE SUFFERED BADLY AT THE HANDS OF THE BIGGER MAN BUT FOR THE INTERVENTION OF THE TRIGAN POLICE.
TRY AND CHEAT ME OUT OF MY HOME, WOULD YOU?
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? STOP THAT BRAWLING!

DO YOU KNOW THIS FELLOW, ROCCO?
NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE. BUT I CAN TELL YOU HE'S EITHER A SCOUNDREL OR HE'S MAD!
HE'S LYING! HE'S STOLEN MY HOME! I'LL GET IT BACK, IF I HAVE TO APPEAL TO THE EMPEROR HIMSELF!

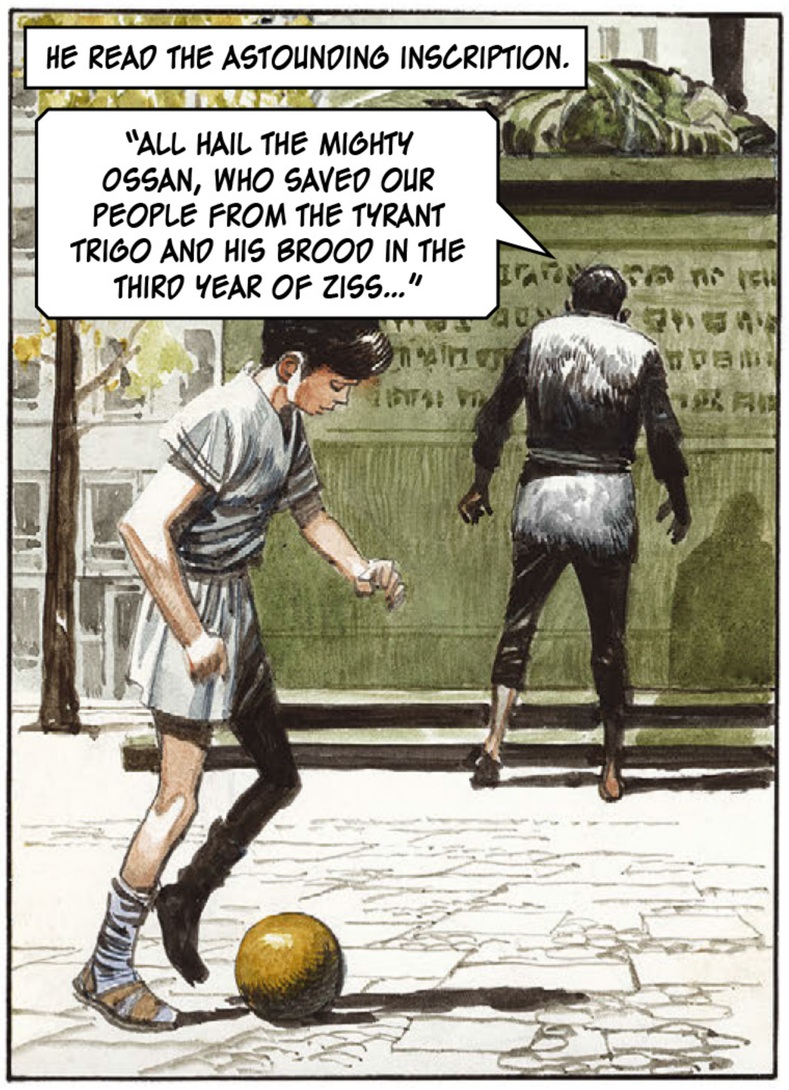
NARRI'S REMARK WON HIM ANOTHER BRUTAL BLOW!
I TOLD YOU HE WAS MAD!
HE MUST BE MAD – TO PRETEND THAT THE EMPEROR AND HIS ACCURSED BROOD WEREN'T WIPED OUT THREE LUNAR YEARS AGO!
YOU DARE TO SPEAK OF THE EMPEROR?


WHAT DO THEY MEAN? FIRST I'M TOLD THAT I'M DEAD, NOW THEY SAY THE EMPEROR'S DEAD! WHAT'S HAPPENED WHILE I'VE BEEN UP IN THE HILLS?

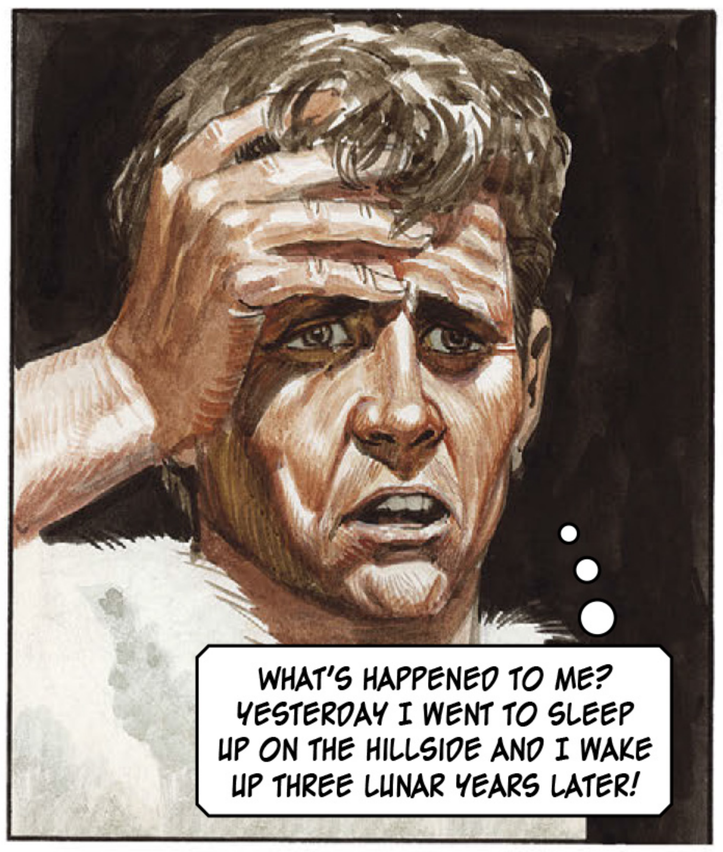
NARRI PICKED HIMSELF UP AND RAN IN TERROR – ANYWHERE TO GET AWAY FROM THE WAKING NIGHTMARE IN WHICH HE HAD JUST FOUND HIMSELF.
MAD! THAT'S WHAT HE IS – MAD!
YOU'D BETTER WATCH OUT OR YOU'LL END UP IN THE PUNISHMENT MINES!

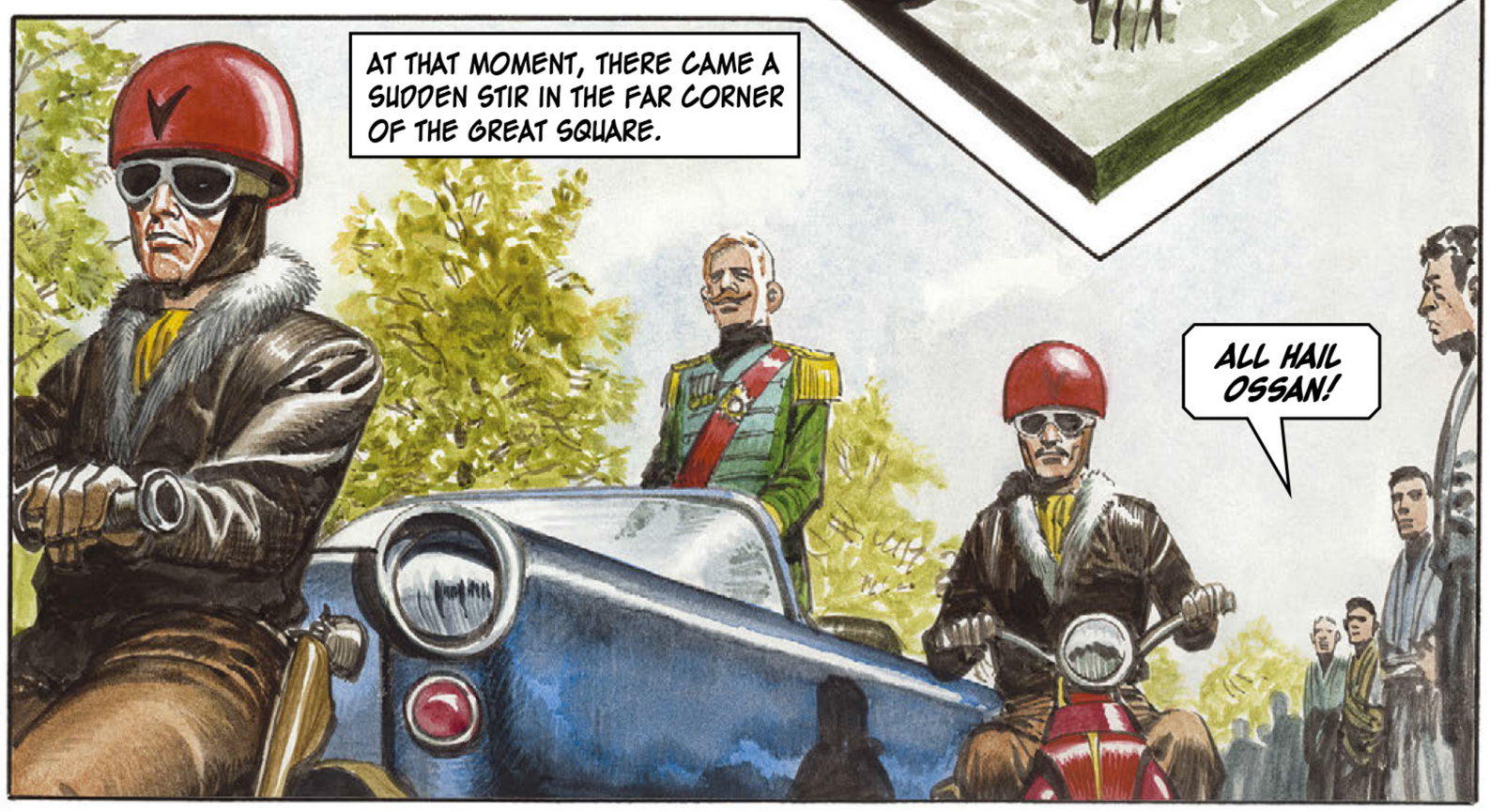
HE DID NOT PAUSE TILL HE CAME TO THE GREAT SQUARE OF THE CITY.
EVERYTHING'S CHANGED OVERNIGHT – EVERYTHING! WHAT'S THAT STATUE DOING THERE IN PLACE OF THE EMPEROR'S STATUE?

BY ALL THE STARS! THOSE SLAIN FIGURES REPRESENT THE EMPEROR, HIS BROTHER BRAG AND THE LORD JANNO! BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?


HE READ THE ASTOUNDING INSCRIPTION.
"ALL HAIL THE MIGHTY OSSAN, WHO SAVED OUR PEOPLE FROM THE TYRANT TRIGO AND HIS BROOD IN THE THIRD YEAR OF ZISS..."

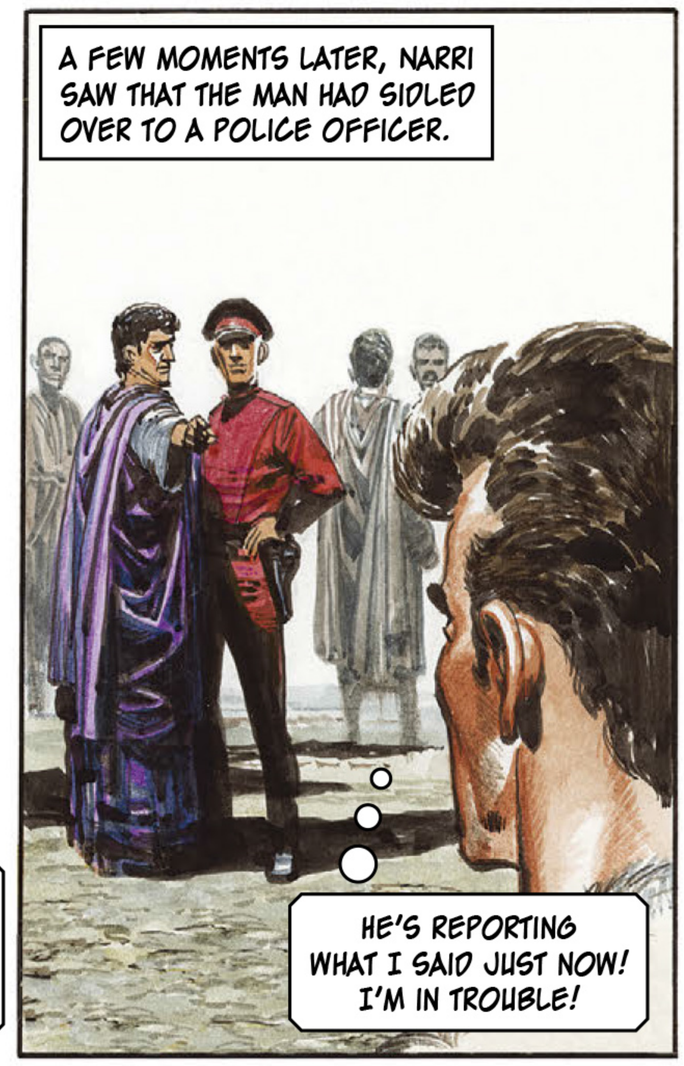
NERVOUSLY, NARRI THREW A QUESTION AT A PASSING URCHIN.
ER... LITTLE FELLOW... DO YOU KNOW WHAT YEAR IT IS?
THE SIXTH YEAR OF ZISS, OF COURSE! EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT!


WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME? YESTERDAY I WENT TO SLEEP UP ON THE HILLSIDE AND I WAKE UP THREE LUNAR YEARS LATER!

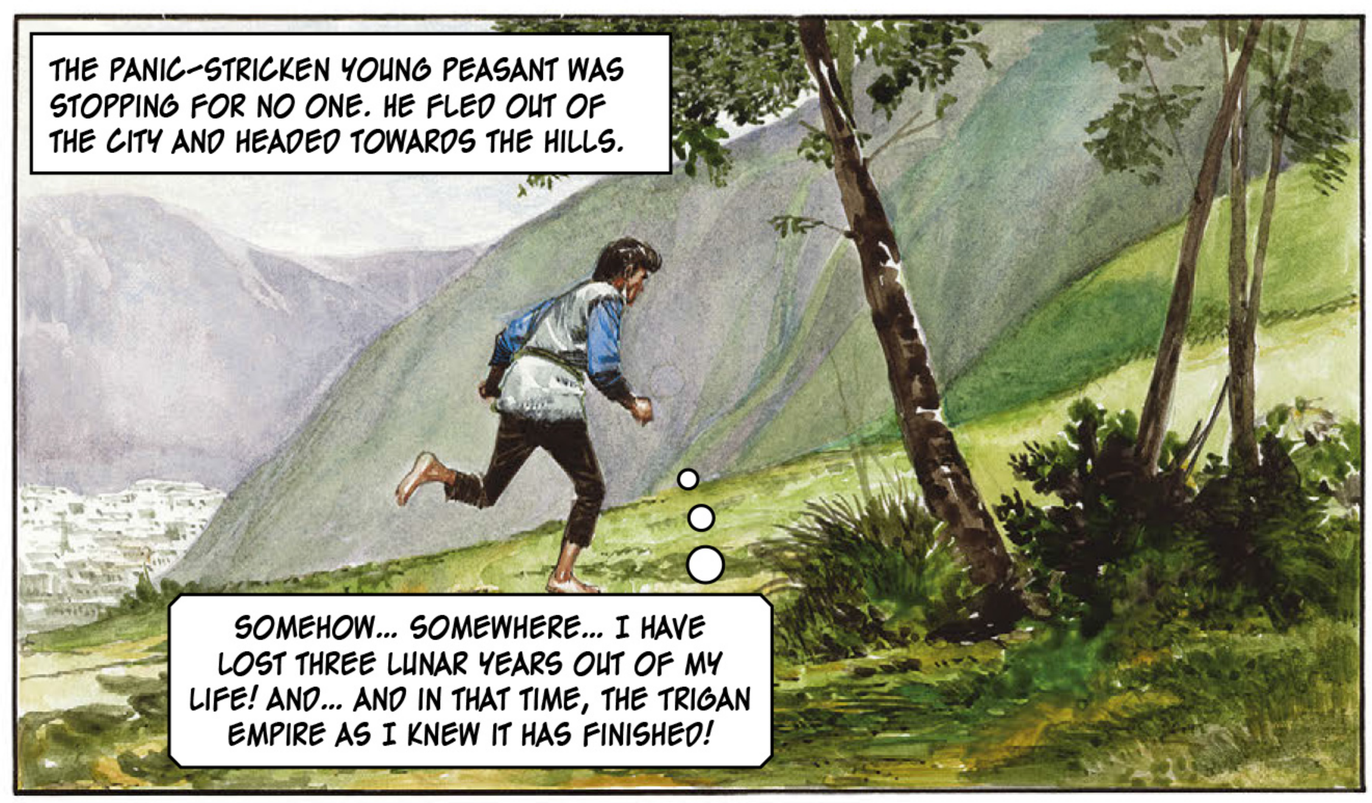

AT THAT MOMENT, THERE CAME A SUDDEN STIR IN THE FAR CORNER OF THE GREAT SQUARE.
ALL HAIL OSSAN!

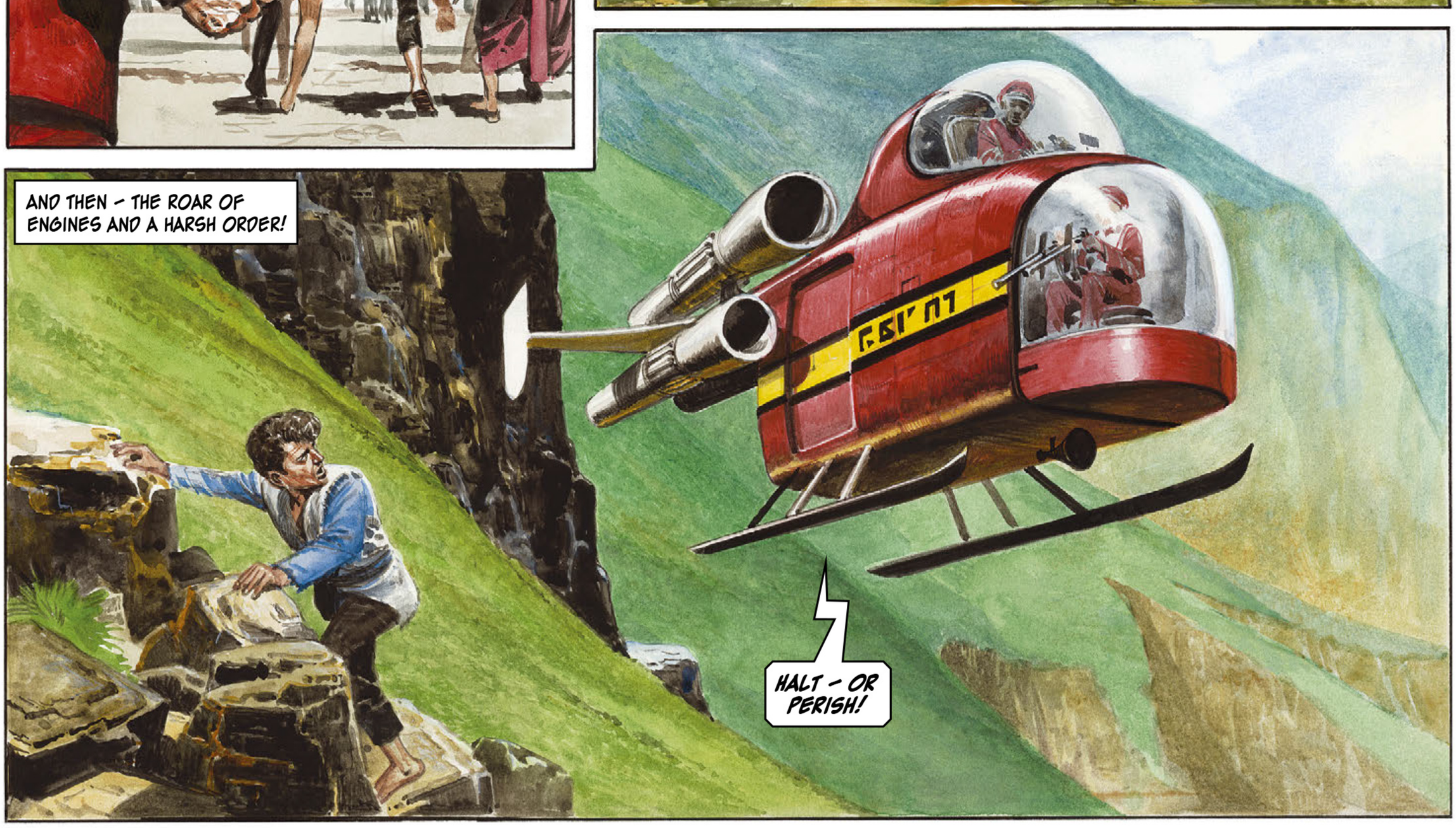
NARRI CAUGHT HIS FIRST BRIEF GLIMPSE OF THE MAN WHO WAS TO PLAY SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART IN HIS LIFE – AND WHOSE LIFE HE, IN TURN, WAS TO CHANGE GREATLY.
THAT IS OSSAN?

MORE QUESTIONS TEEMED IN NARRI'S MIND. HE ASKED A MAN STANDING NEXT TO HIM...
THE PEOPLE DON'T SEEM VERY ENTHUSED ABOUT THEIR RULER. ISN'T HE POPULAR?
YOU WANT TO BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, FELLOW!


A FEW MOMENTS LATER, NARRI SAW THAT THE MAN HAD SIDLED OVER TO A POLICE OFFICER.
HE'S REPORTING WHAT I SAID JUST NOW! I'M IN TROUBLE!

NARRI TOOK TO HIS HEELS.
HEY, YOU! STOP! STOP, I SAY!


THE PANIC-STRICKEN YOUNG PEASANT WAS STOPPING FOR NO ONE. HE FLED OUT OF THE CITY AND HEADED TOWARDS THE HILLS.
SOMEHOW... SOMEWHERE... I HAVE LOST THREE LUNAR YEARS OUT OF MY LIFE! AND... AND IN THAT TIME, THE TRIGAN EMPIRE AS I KNEW IT HAS FINISHED!


AND THEN – THE ROAR OF ENGINES AND A HARSH ORDER!
HALT – OR PERISH!

NARRI KEPT RUNNING. THE POLICE AIR CRAFT OPENED FIRE!
THE PENALTY FOR DISOBEDIENCE IS ELIMINATION!

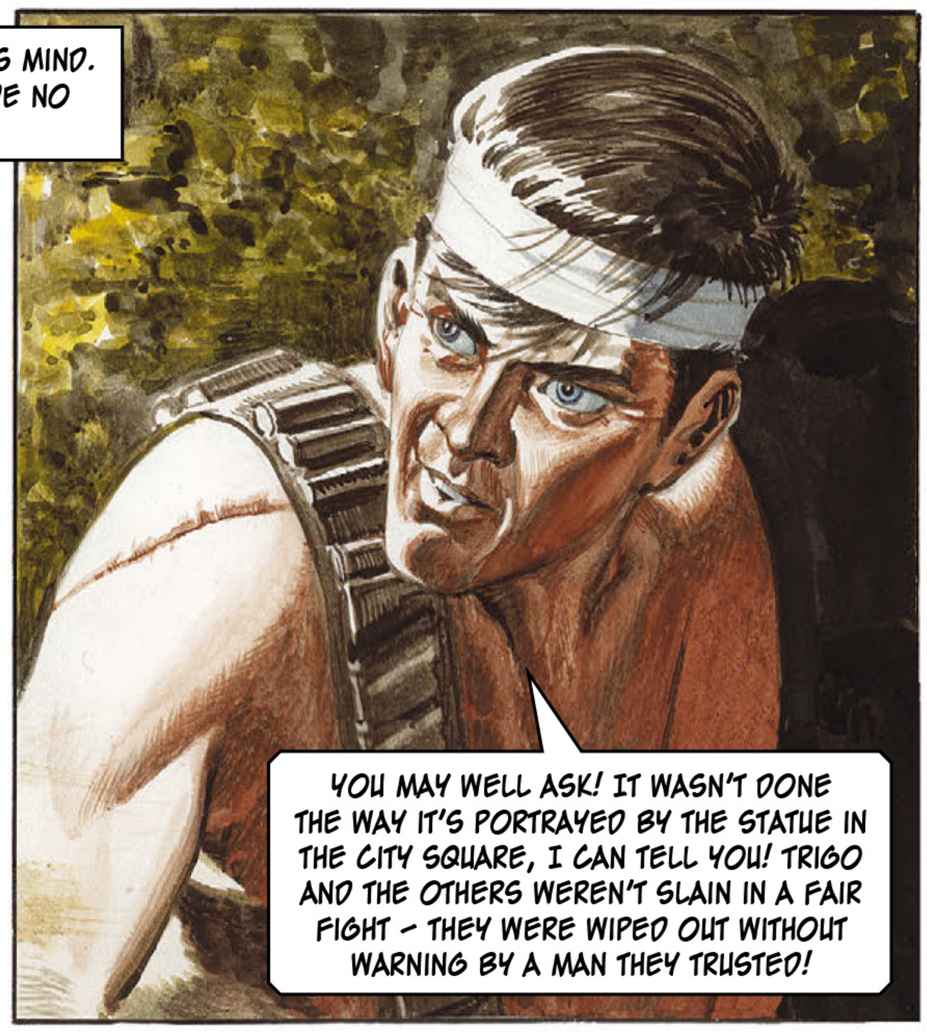
SUDDENLY, HIS ARM WAS SEIZED.
TAKE ANOTHER STEP AND THOSE DEMONS WILL GET YOU!
HUH?

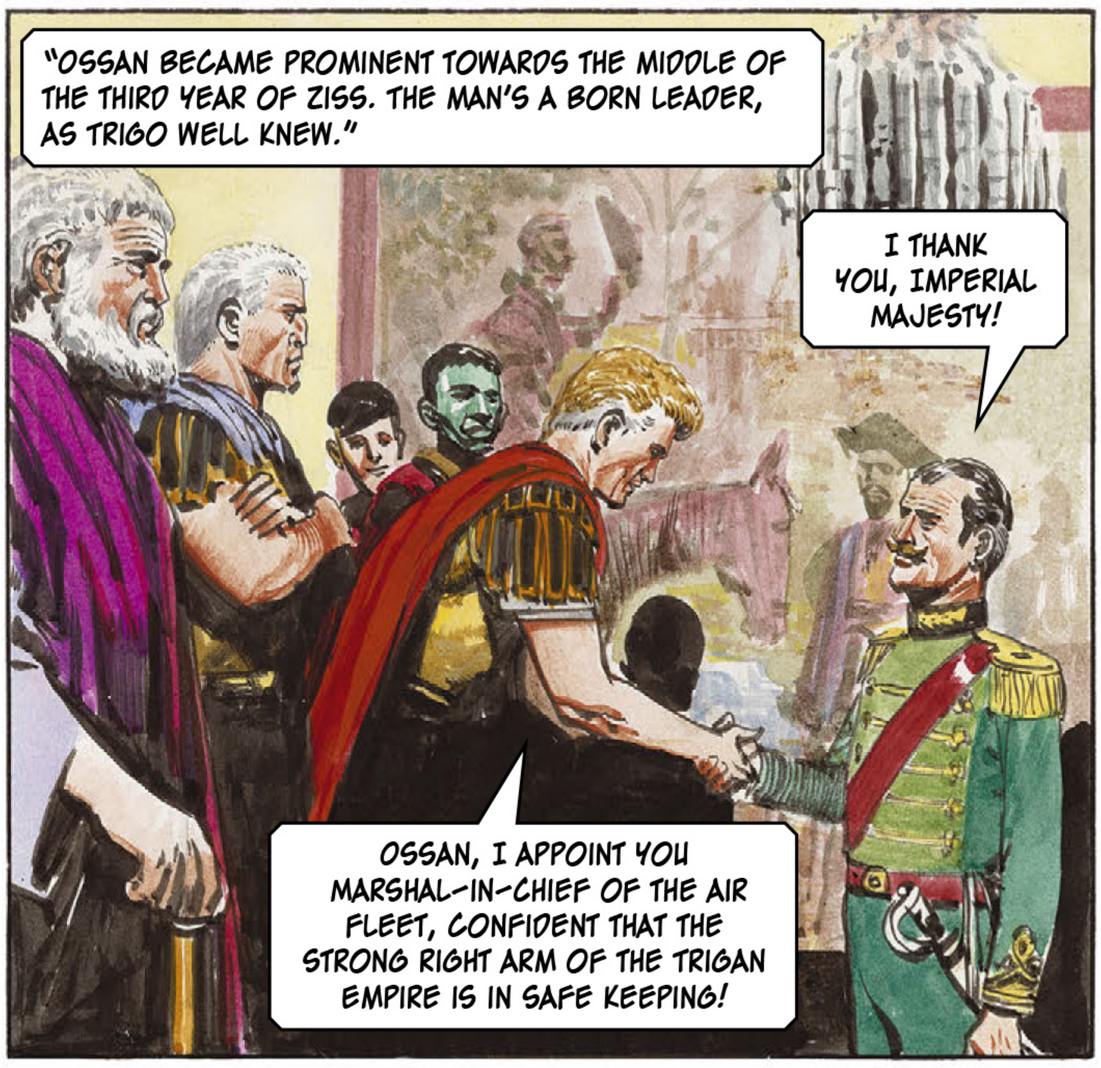
GET IN THERE! QUICKLY!

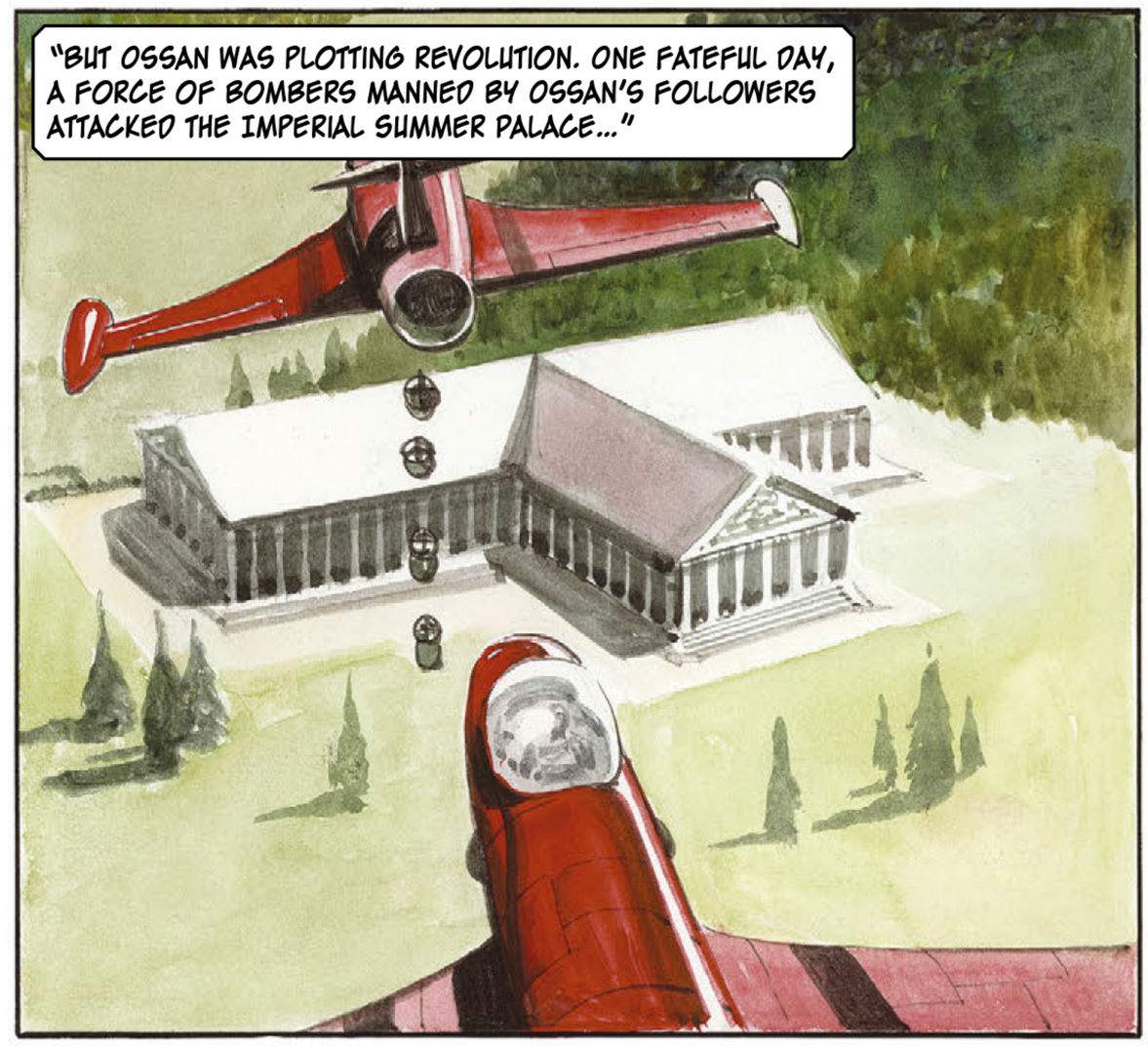
NARRI OBEYED. MOMENTS LATER, HIS NEW FRIEND JOINED HIM DOWN THE HOLE.
THEY'VE GONE PAST! I DON'T THINK THEY SAW THE ENTRANCE!

NARRI STARED AT HIS RESCUER.
WHO- WHO ARE YOU?
MY NAME'S ROFFA. FORMERLY A PILOT IN THE AIR FLEET, NOW THE UNDERGROUND ARMY FOR THE OVERTHROW OF THE TYRANT, OSSAN - ALL OF IT!

A THOUSAND QUESTIONS TEEMED IN NARRI'S MIND. NOT WISHING TO BE THOUGHT MAD, HE MADE NO MENTION OF HIS THREE LOST YEARS.
I'VE BEEN - ER - ABROAD FOR MANY YEARS AND MUCH HAS HAPPENED SINCE I'VE BEEN AWAY. HOW DID THIS FELLOW OSSAN COME TO TAKE OVER THE TRIGAN EMPIRE?


YOU MAY WELL ASK! IT WASN'T DONE THE WAY IT'S PORTRAYED BY THE STATUE IN THE CITY SQUARE, I CAN TELL YOU! TRIGO AND THE OTHERS WEREN'T SLAIN IN A FAIR FIGHT - THEY WERE WIPED OUT WITHOUT WARNING BY A MAN THEY TRUSTED!


"OSSAN BECAME PROMINENT TOWARDS THE MIDDLE OF THE THIRD YEAR OF ZISS. THE MAN'S A BORN LEADER, AS TRIGO WELL KNEW."
I THANK YOU, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!
OSSAN, I APPOINT YOU MARSHAL-IN-CHIEF OF THE AIR FLEET, CONFIDENT THAT THE STRONG RIGHT ARM OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE IS IN SAFE KEEPING!


"BUT OSSAN WAS PLOTTING REVOLUTION. ONE FATEFUL DAY, A FORCE OF BOMBERS MANNED BY OSSAN'S FOLLOWERS ATTACKED THE IMPERIAL SUMMER PALACE..."

"TRIGO AND BRAG MANAGED TO GET OUT OF THE DOOMED BUILDING, CARRYING THE GRAVELY-WOUNDED JANNO..."
LOOK OUT, TRIGO - THERE'S ONE COMING RIGHT AT US!

ROFFA CONCLUDED HIS SOMBRE STORY.
THEY NEVER HAD A CHANCE! AND THE FOLLOWING DAY, OSSAN APPOINTED HIMSELF DICTATOR OF THE TRIGANS. A LOT OF US FOUGHT BACK BUT IT WAS NO USE. I'M THE LAST OF THE RESISTANCE, LIVING LIKE AN ANIMAL IN THE GROUND - BUT THEY'LL GET ME IN THE END!

THAT NIGHT, NARRI LAY RESTLESS.
BUT THERE STILL REMAINS THE PROBLEM OF HOW I CAME TO LOSE THREE WHOLE LUNAR YEARS! WHAT WAS I DOING WHEN ALL THESE THINGS WERE HAPPENING?

WITHOUT WAKING ROFFA, HE CREPT OUT INTO THE LIGHT OF ELEKTON'S TWIN MOONS.
I'VE GOT TO GO BACK TO WHERE IT ALL BEGAN. PERHAPS - SOMEHOW - I CAN WIN BACK THOSE LOST YEARS THAT WENT IN THE SPACE OF ONE NIGHT!

WITH SOME DIFFICULTY, NARRI FOUND THE ROCKY OUTCROP WHERE HE HAD SLEPT ON THAT FATEFUL NIGHT.
THIS IS THE VERY SPOT. I LAY DOWN HERE AND SLEPT. AND, BY THE STARS, I'LL DO IT AGAIN!

HE THREW HIMSELF DOWN. WITHIN A SHORT TIME, HE WAS SLEEPING THE SLEEP OF THE WEARY. AND THEN – A STRANGE VAPOUR ISSUED FROM A CLEFT IN THE ROCK.

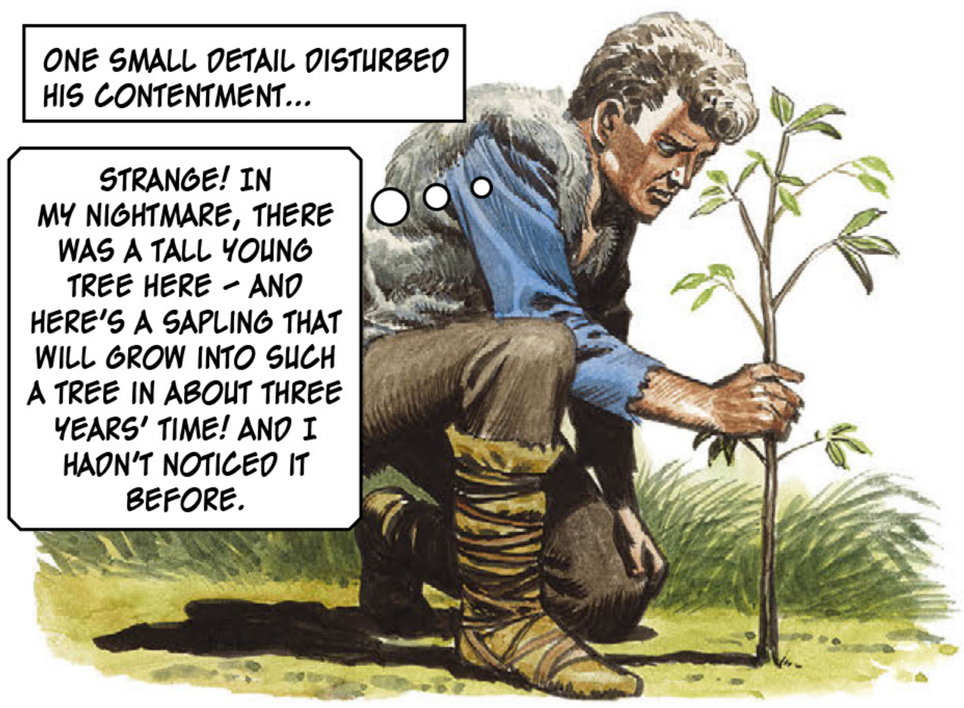
HE WOKE UP AT DAWN... AND SAW...
A HERD OF GLEBES! CAN IT BE...?

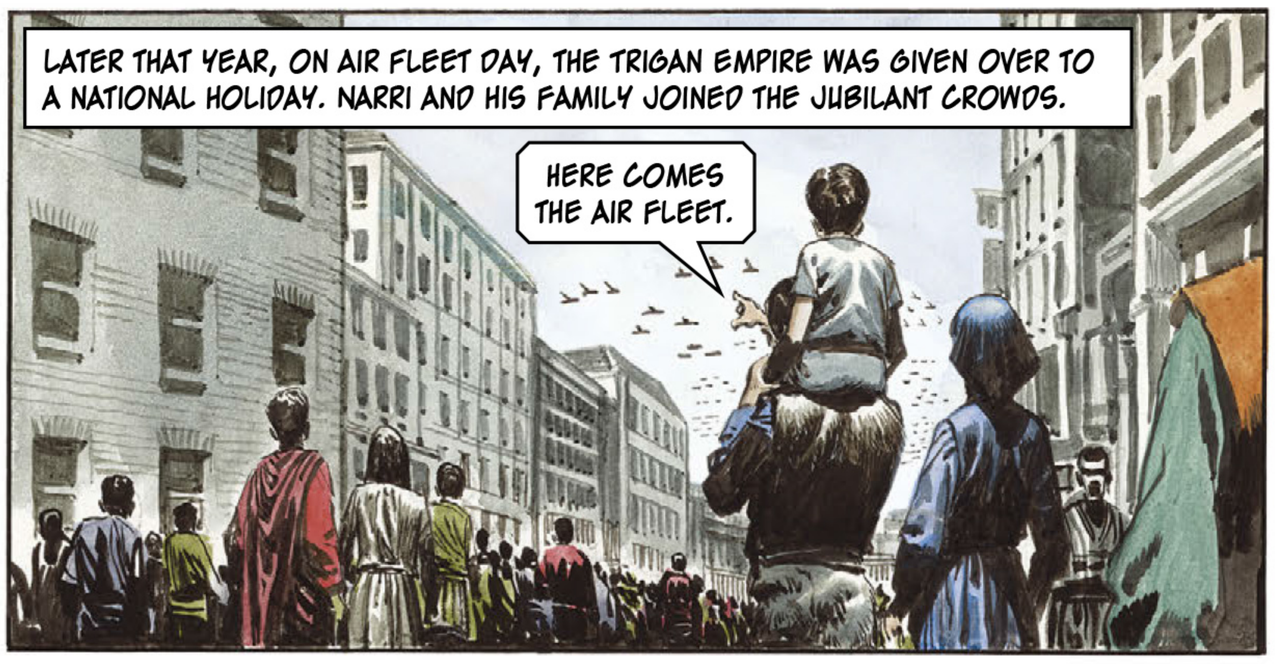
THIS IS MY OLD HERD-LEADER! IT'S TRUE! A MIRACLE HAS HAPPENED. THEY ARE JUST AS I LEFT THEM, THREE LUNAR YEARS AGO!

HE RETURNED TO THE PLACE WHERE HE HAD HIDDEN WITH ROFFA.
THE ENTRANCE TO ROFFA'S SECRET HIDE-OUT – IT'S NOT HERE! OF COURSE IT'S NOT HERE!

THE WHOLE THING WAS A DREAM – A NIGHTMARE! I WENT TO SLEEP LAST NIGHT AND IMAGINED ALL THAT RUBBISH! HA!

JOYFULLY, HE RETURNED TO HIS HOVEL IN THE CITY, TO BE GREETED BY HIS BELOVED WIFE AND CHILD.
BACK ALREADY? YOU SAID YOU'D BE UP AT THE PASTURES A WHOLE LUNAR MONTH.
AH! I HAD AN URGE TO COME BACK AND MAKE SURE YOU WERE ALL WELL.


ONE SMALL DETAIL DISTURBED HIS CONTENTMENT...
STRANGE! IN MY NIGHTMARE, THERE WAS A TALL YOUNG TREE HERE – AND HERE'S A SAPLING THAT WILL GROW INTO SUCH A TREE IN ABOUT THREE YEARS' TIME! AND I HADN'T NOTICED IT BEFORE.


LATER THAT YEAR, ON AIR FLEET DAY, THE TRIGAN EMPIRE WAS GIVEN OVER TO A NATIONAL HOLIDAY. NARRI AND HIS FAMILY JOINED THE JUBILANT CROWDS.
HERE COMES THE AIR FLEET.

THE PRIDE OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE FLASHED OVER THE GREAT CITY IN FAULTLESS FORMATION.
AS PART OF THE CELEBRATIONS, A CERTAIN CEREMONY WAS HELD IN THE THRONE-ROOM OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE.
OSSAN, I APPOINT YOU MARSHAL-IN-CHIEF OF THE AIR FLEET.

NARRI SAW IT RELAYED, LIVE – ALONG WITH THOUSANDS OF OTHERS – IN THE GREAT SQUARE.
IT'S OSSAN! THE TRAITOR! THE ONE WHO WIPED OUT THE IMPERIAL FAMILY AND SET HIMSELF UP AS DICTATOR.

IT WAS THEN THAT NARRI REALISED WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM.
NARRI! WHAT'S COME OVER YOU? EVERYONE'S STARING AT US!
IT'S JUST AS ROFFA TOLD IT TO ME! ONLY IT'S ALL IN THE FUTURE!
WHEN I FELL ASLEEP ON THAT MOUNTAIN SIDE, I WAS GRANTED A VISION OF WHAT WILL BE TAKING PLACE HERE IN THREE YEARS' TIME!

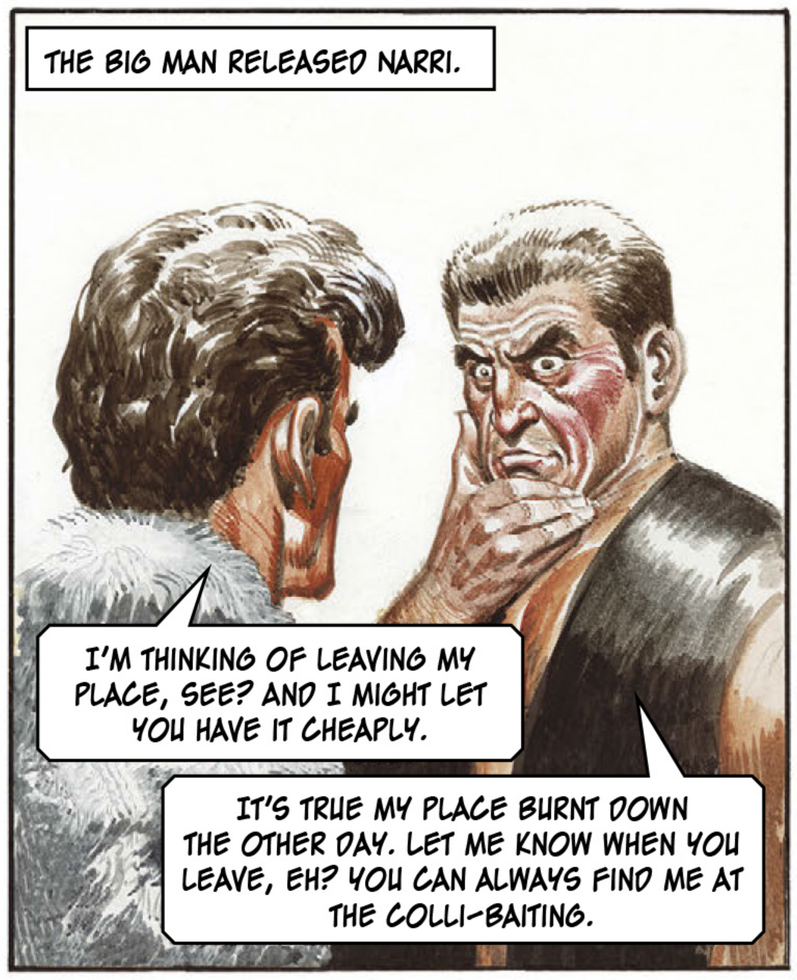
IN THE WORST PART OF TRIGAN CITY WAS A LOW HAUNT GIVEN OVER TO THE ILLEGAL SPORT OF COLLI-BAITING. ONE NIGHT, A STRANGER ENTERED...
WHO ARE YOU... AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?

ALL STRANGERS WERE SUSPECT IN THAT EVIL DEN.
ER – I'M TRYING TO FIND A MAN NAMED ROCCO... TALL AND HARD-LOOKING? PERHAPS YOU KNOW HIM?
ROCCO? NEVER HEARD THE NAME! BE OFF WITH YOU!

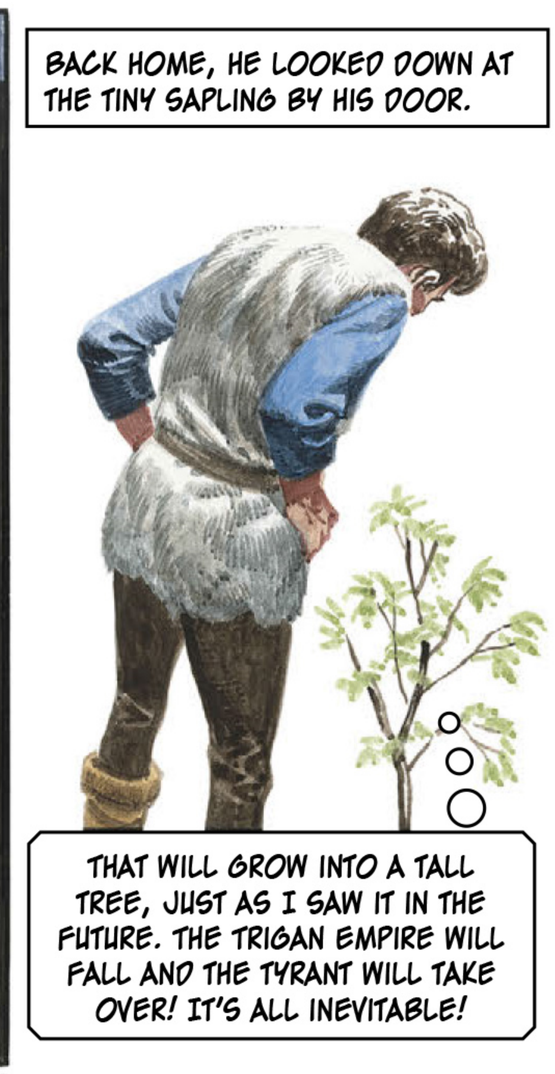
NARRI WALKED AWAY DOWN THE ILL-LIT ALLEYWAY.
I'VE SEARCHED EVERYWHERE FOR HIM AND THAT WAS MY LAST HOPE. IT'S NO USE!

AND THEN... IT HAPPENED!
AAEEGGHH...
WHO ARE YOU, EH? A POLICE SPY?

WHY ARE YOU SEARCHING FOR ME, HEY?
I... I HEARD THAT YOU WERE LOOKING FOR SOMEWHERE TO LIVE AND... AND I MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP YOU!


THE BIG MAN RELEASED NARRI.
I'M THINKING OF LEAVING MY PLACE, SEE? AND I MIGHT LET YOU HAVE IT CHEAPLY.
IT'S TRUE MY PLACE BURNT DOWN THE OTHER DAY. LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU LEAVE, EH? YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND ME AT THE COLLI-BAITING.

NARRI WENT ON HIS WAY, A GREAT DREAD IN HIS HEART.
IT REALLY WASN'T A DREAM. IT WILL ALL HAPPEN! ROCCO WILL TAKE OVER MY HOUSE, JUST AS I SAW HIM. YOU CAN'T CHANGE THE FUTURE!


BACK HOME, HE LOOKED DOWN AT THE TINY SAPLING BY HIS DOOR.
THAT WILL GROW INTO A TALL TREE, JUST AS I SAW IT IN THE FUTURE. THE TRIGAN EMPIRE WILL FALL AND THE TYRANT WILL TAKE OVER! IT'S ALL INEVITABLE!

AND THEN... WITH A SUDDEN FLASH OF INSPIRATION...
IT'S NOT INEVITABLE! THIS SAPLING WON'T GROW INTO A TREE FOR A START!

MY FORE-KNOWLEDGE HAS ENABLED ME TO DESTROY THE SAPLING AND CHANGE ITS FUTURE, SO I CAN CHANGE THE COURSE OF OTHER FUTURE EVENTS! WITH MY FORE-KNOWLEDGE, I CAN SAVE THE TRIGAN EMPIRE!

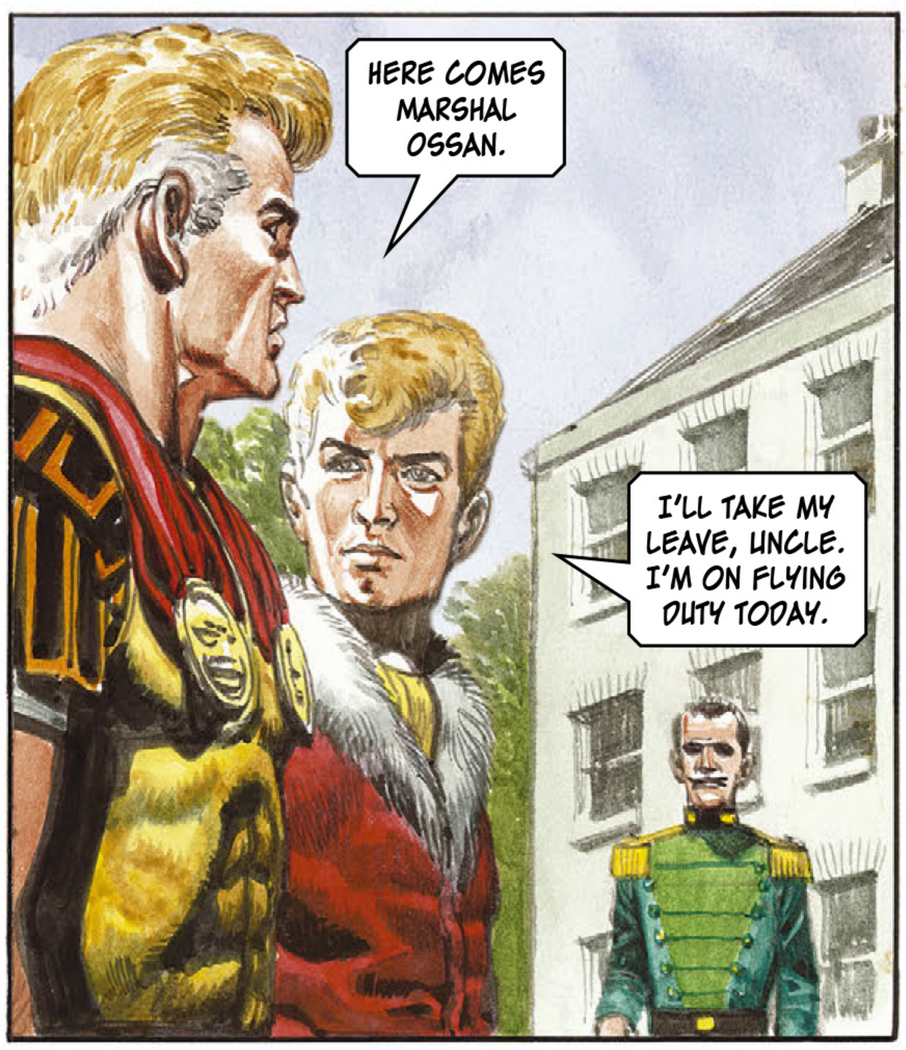
EARLY NEXT MORNING, THE EMPEROR TRIGO AND HIS YOUNG NEPHEW JANNO WERE AT SWORDPLAY EXERCISE IN A COURTYARD OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE.
HAH!
WELL DONE, LAD! YOU IMPROVE DAILY!

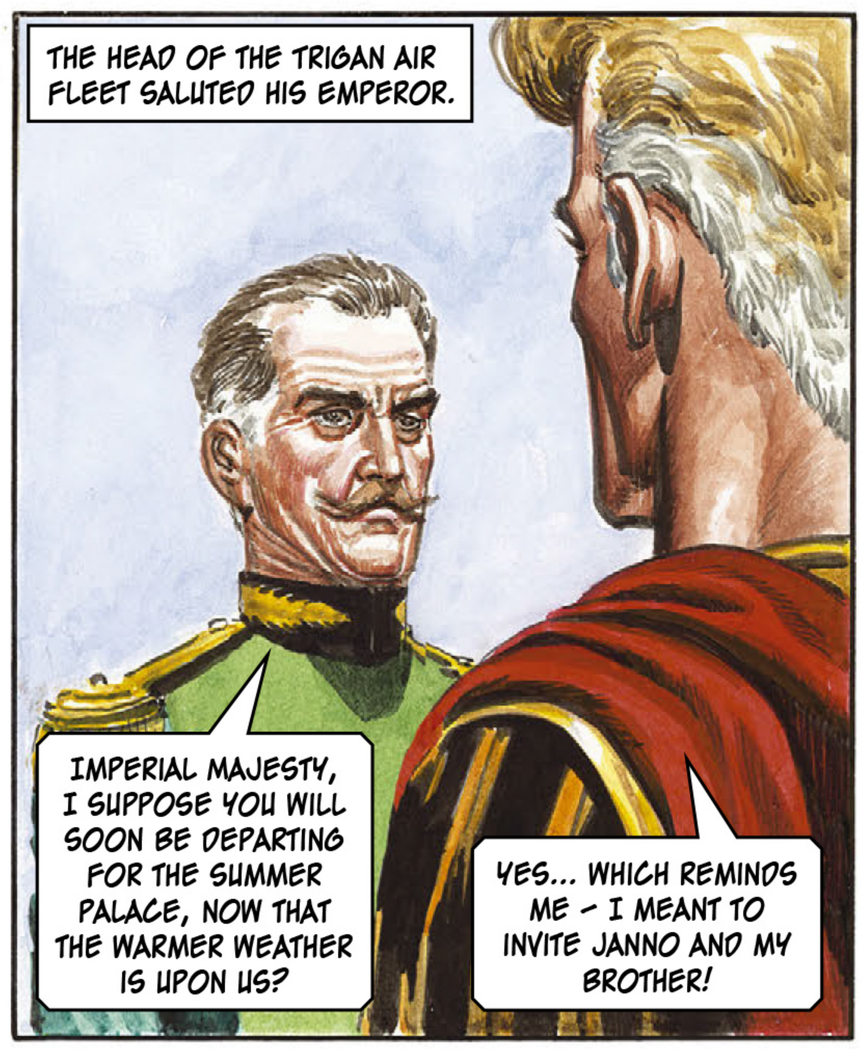
SUDDENLY, A FIGURE LEAPT FROM THE TOP OF THE HIGH WALL!
CUT HIM DOWN!
IMPERIAL MAJESTY!

NARRI STRUGGLED FORWARD AND THREW HIMSELF AT THE FEET OF HIS EMPEROR.
WHO IS THIS FELLOW?
HE'S OBVIOUSLY MAD!
YOU ARE IN DANGER, IMPERIAL MAJESTY. ONLY I CAN SAVE YOU! YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME...!

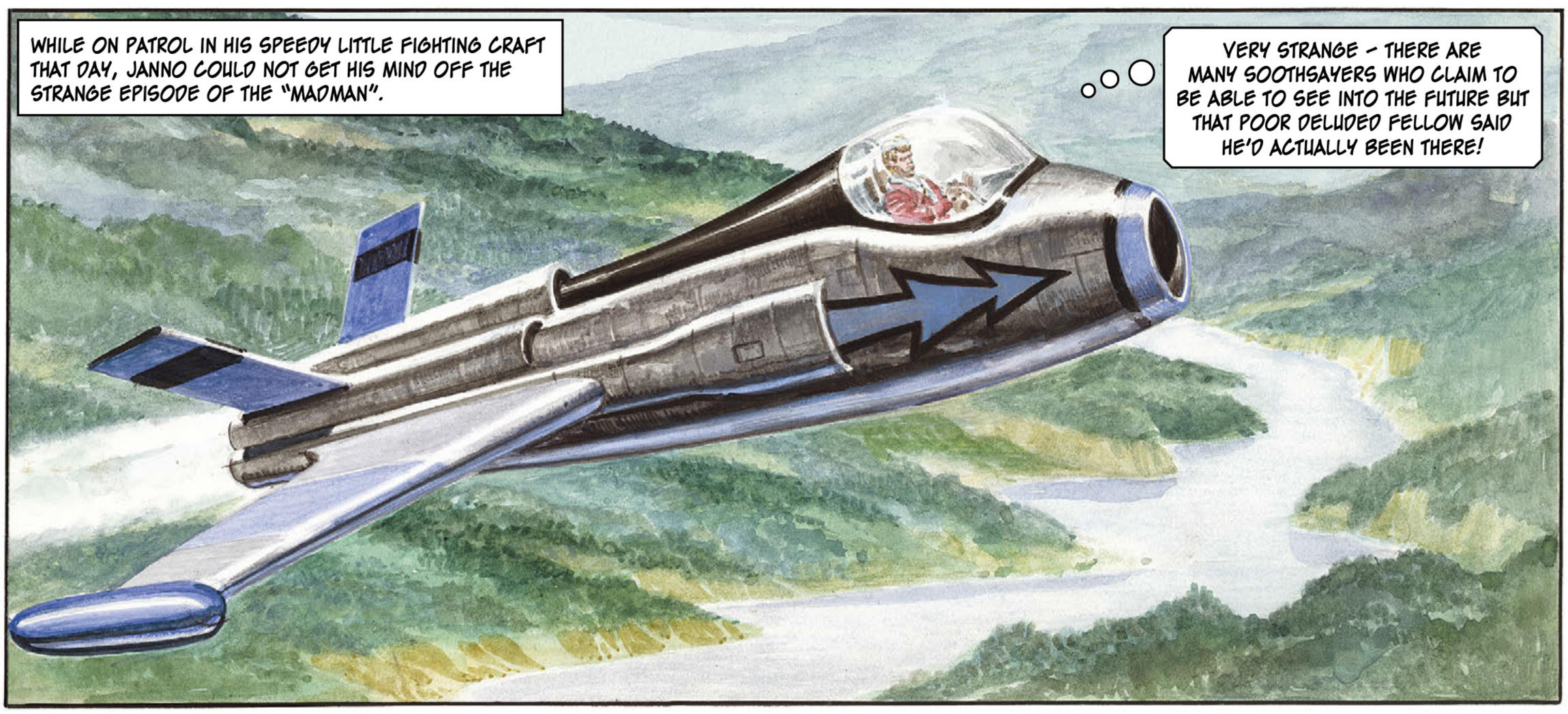
NARRI'S VOICE ROSE HYSTERICALLY.
YOU WILL ALL BE WIPED OUT – THE IMPERIAL FAMILY – ANY DAY NOW!
TAKE HIM AWAY AND LOCK HIM UP WHERE HE'LL DO NO HARM!

I CAN SEE INTO THE FUTURE, I TELL YOU! I'VE BEEN THERE!
HE'S AS MAD AS A DAVELI ZARGOT.
ONE CAN ONLY FEEL COMPASSION FOR THE POOR WRETCH.


HERE COMES MARSHAL OSSAN.
I'LL TAKE MY LEAVE, UNCLE. I'M ON FLYING DUTY TODAY.


THE HEAD OF THE TRIGAN AIR FLEET SALUTED HIS EMPEROR.
IMPERIAL MAJESTY, I SUPPOSE YOU WILL SOON BE DEPARTING FOR THE SUMMER PALACE, NOW THAT THE WARMER WEATHER IS UPON US?
YES... WHICH REMINDS ME – I MEANT TO INVITE JANNO AND MY BROTHER!

I HAD IT IN MIND TO ARRANGE A LITTLE AIR DISPLAY OVER THE SUMMER PALACE – IN HONOUR OF YOUR ARRIVAL THERE.
THAT WILL PROVIDE A FINE SPECTACLE, MARSHAL.


WHILE ON PATROL IN HIS SPEEDY LITTLE FIGHTING CRAFT THAT DAY, JANNO COULD NOT GET HIS MIND OFF THE STRANGE EPISODE OF THE "MADMAN".
VERY STRANGE – THERE ARE MANY SOOTHSAYERS WHO CLAIM TO BE ABLE TO SEE INTO THE FUTURE BUT THAT POOR DELUDED FELLOW SAID HE'D ACTUALLY BEEN THERE!

SOME IMP OF CURIOSITY TOOK HIM THAT EVENING TO THE DREAD PLACE WHERE THE DANGEROUSLY INCURABLE WERE INCARCERATED.

YOU HAVE THE WRETCH WHO ACCOSTED THE EMPEROR?

HE CALLS HIMSELF NARRI, MY LORD. PLEASE TO COME THIS WAY.

PRESENTLY HE WAS LOOKING DOWN ON THE PRISONER.

NARRI – DO YOU KNOW ME?

HUH?

LORD JANNO – THANK THE STARS! LISTEN TO ME AND ALL WILL BE WELL.

I'M LISTENING!

BEWARE OF THE IMPERIAL SUMMER PALACE! DO NOT GO NEAR THE PLACE – FOR YOU, YOUR FATHER AND THE EMPEROR ARE FATED TO BE ASSASSINATED THERE!

ASSASSINATED? BY WHOM?

BY OSSAN! HE'S PLOTTING REVOLUTION! A FORCE OF BOMBERS MANNED BY HIS SUPPORTERS WILL ATTACK THE PALACE!

MARSHAL OSSAN? RIDICULOUS!

JANNO WAITED TO HEAR NO MORE.

THAT PROVES HE'S MAD. I SHALL NOT BE AT THE SUMMER PALACE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. I SELDOM GO NEAR THE PLACE.

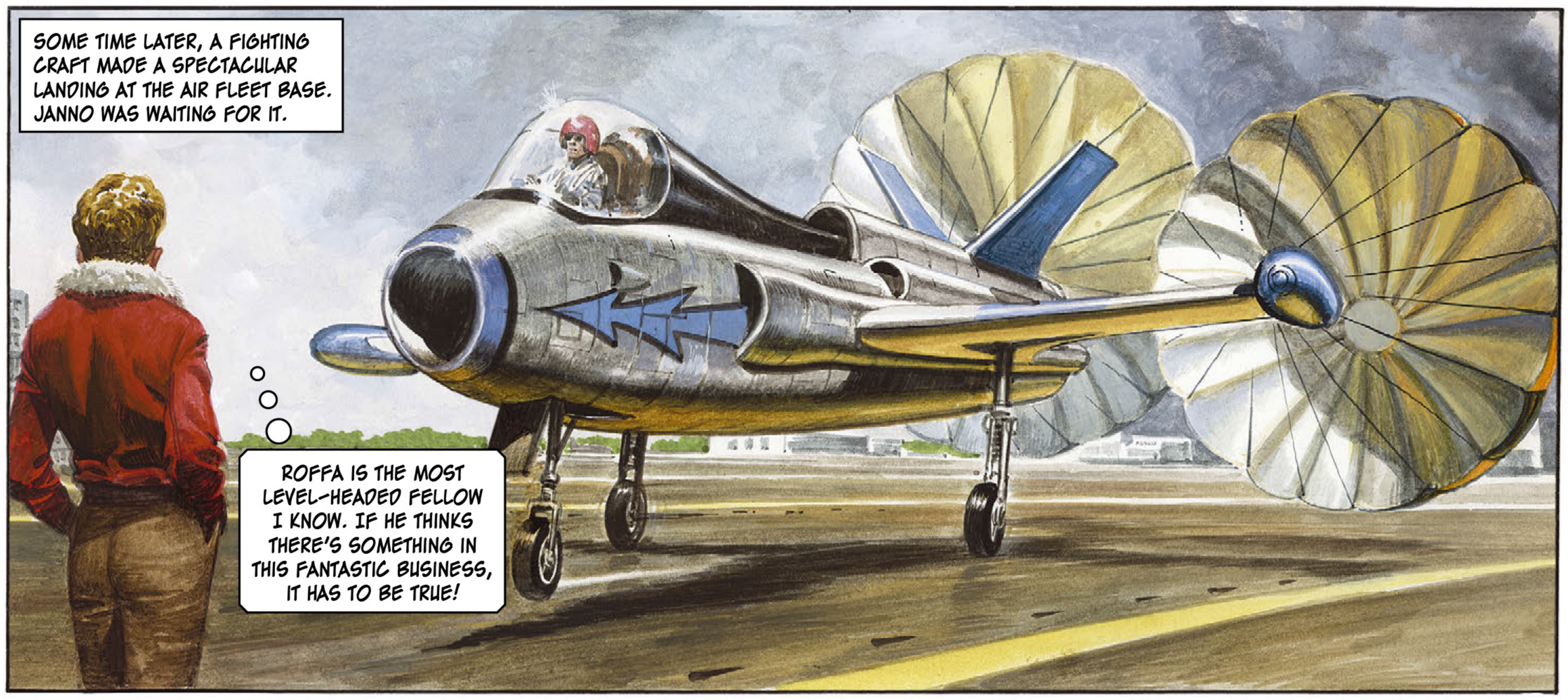
DON'T GO – I BEG YOU!

ARRIVING BACK AT THE AIR FLEET BASE...

MESSAGE FROM HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

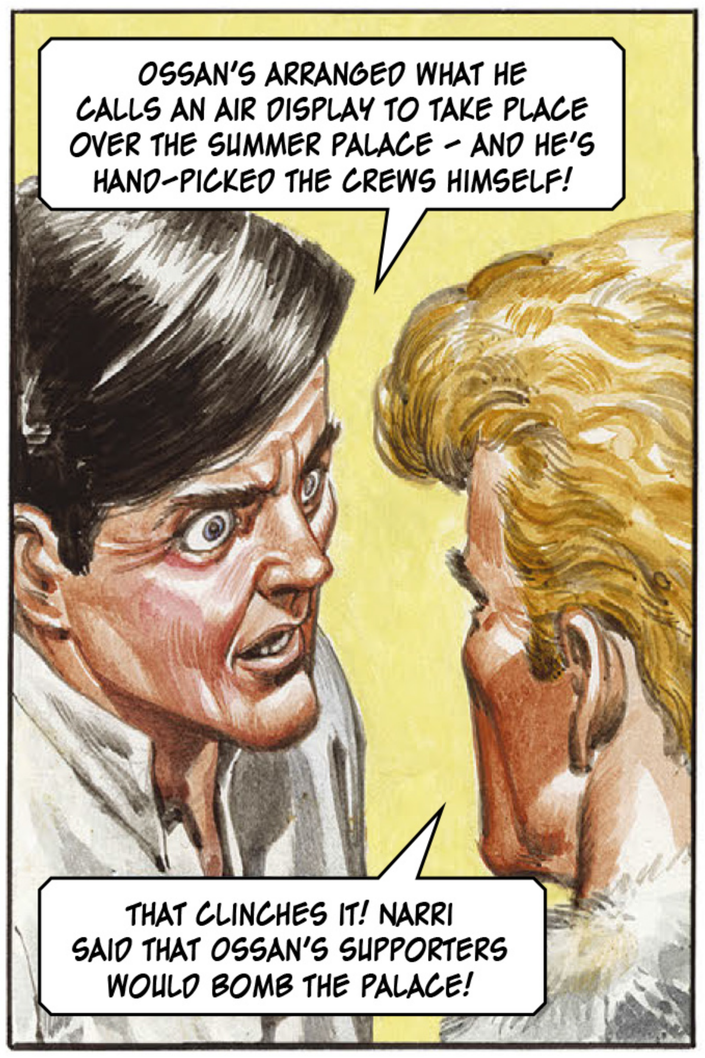
WONDER WHAT IT IS?

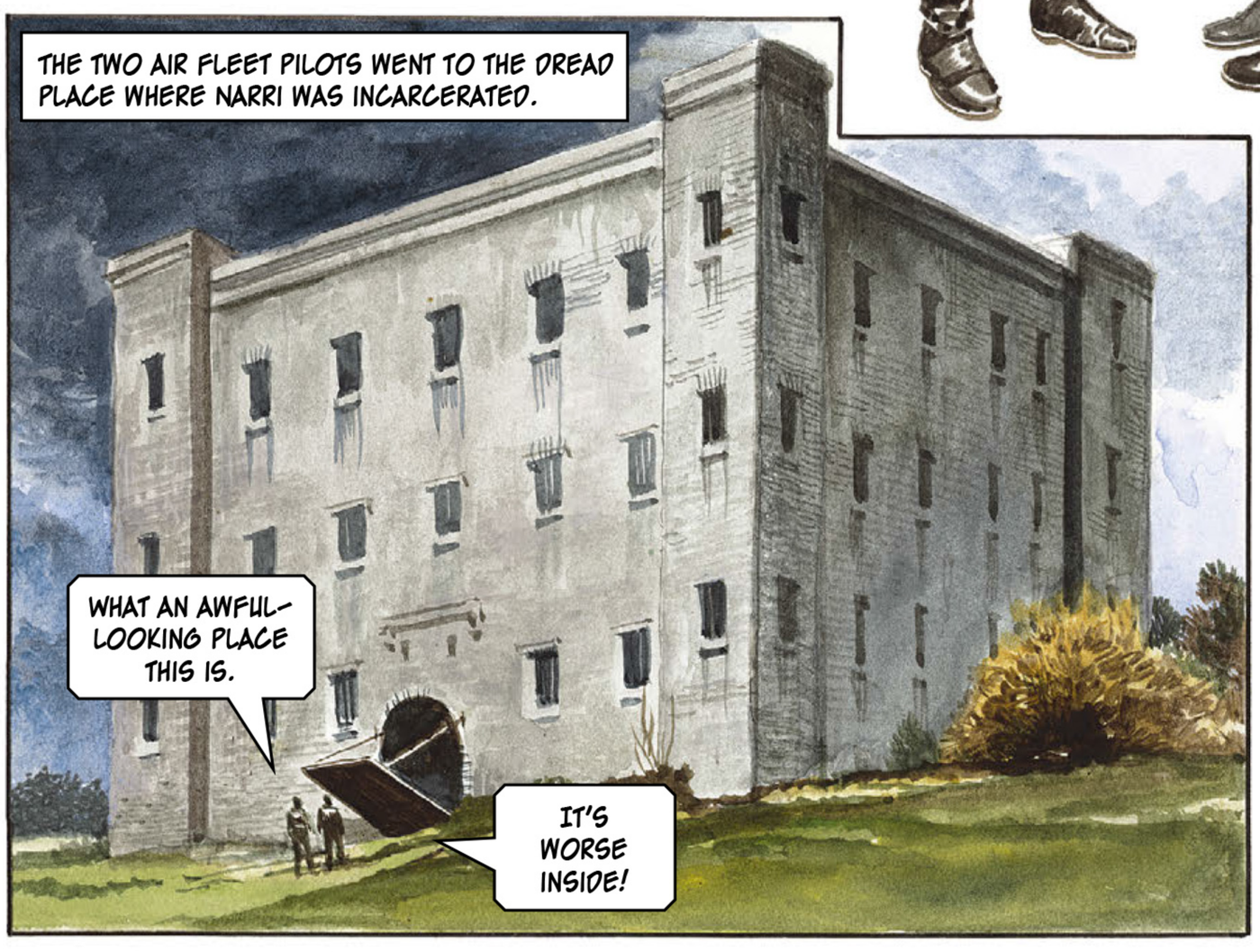
BY ALL THE STARS! IT'S... IT'S AN INVITATION TO STAY AT THE SUMMER PALACE!

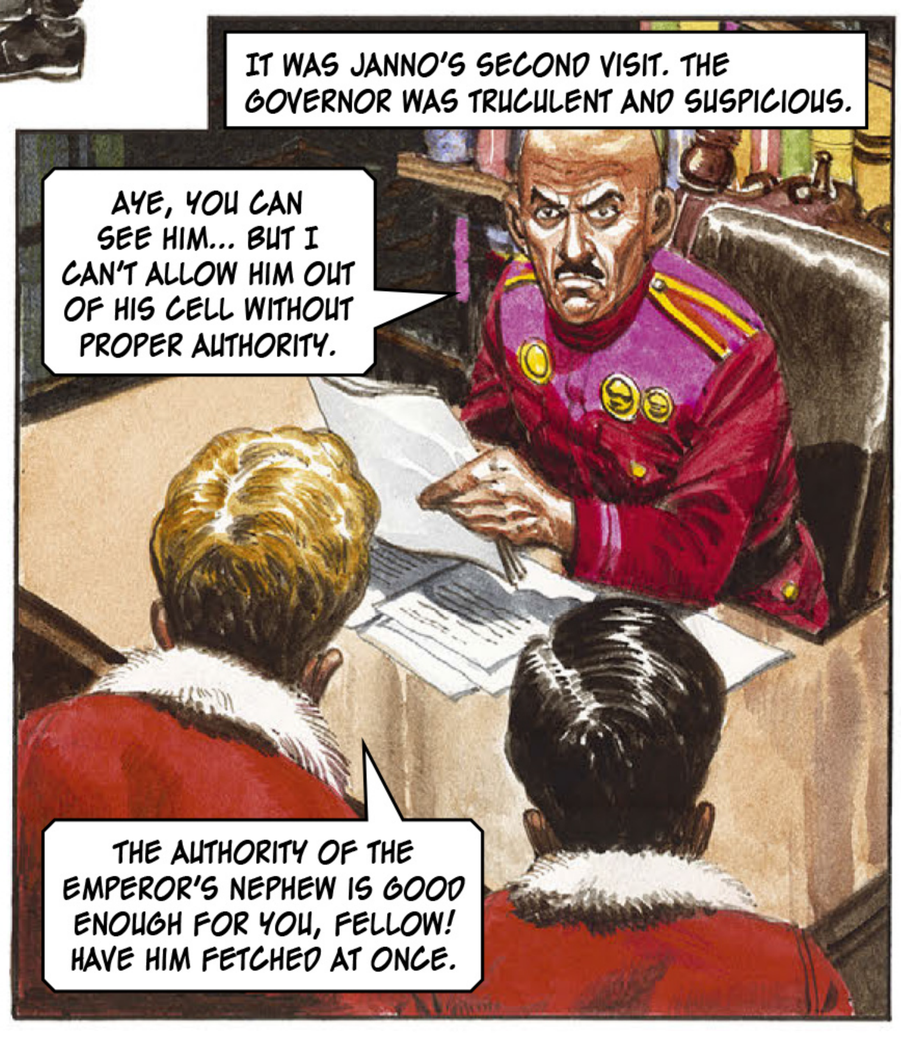

SOME TIME LATER, A FIGHTING CRAFT MADE A SPECTACULAR LANDING AT THE AIR FLEET BASE. JANNO WAS WAITING FOR IT.
ROFFA IS THE MOST LEVEL-HEADED FELLOW I KNOW. IF HE THINKS THERE'S SOMETHING IN THIS FANTASTIC BUSINESS, IT HAS TO BE TRUE!

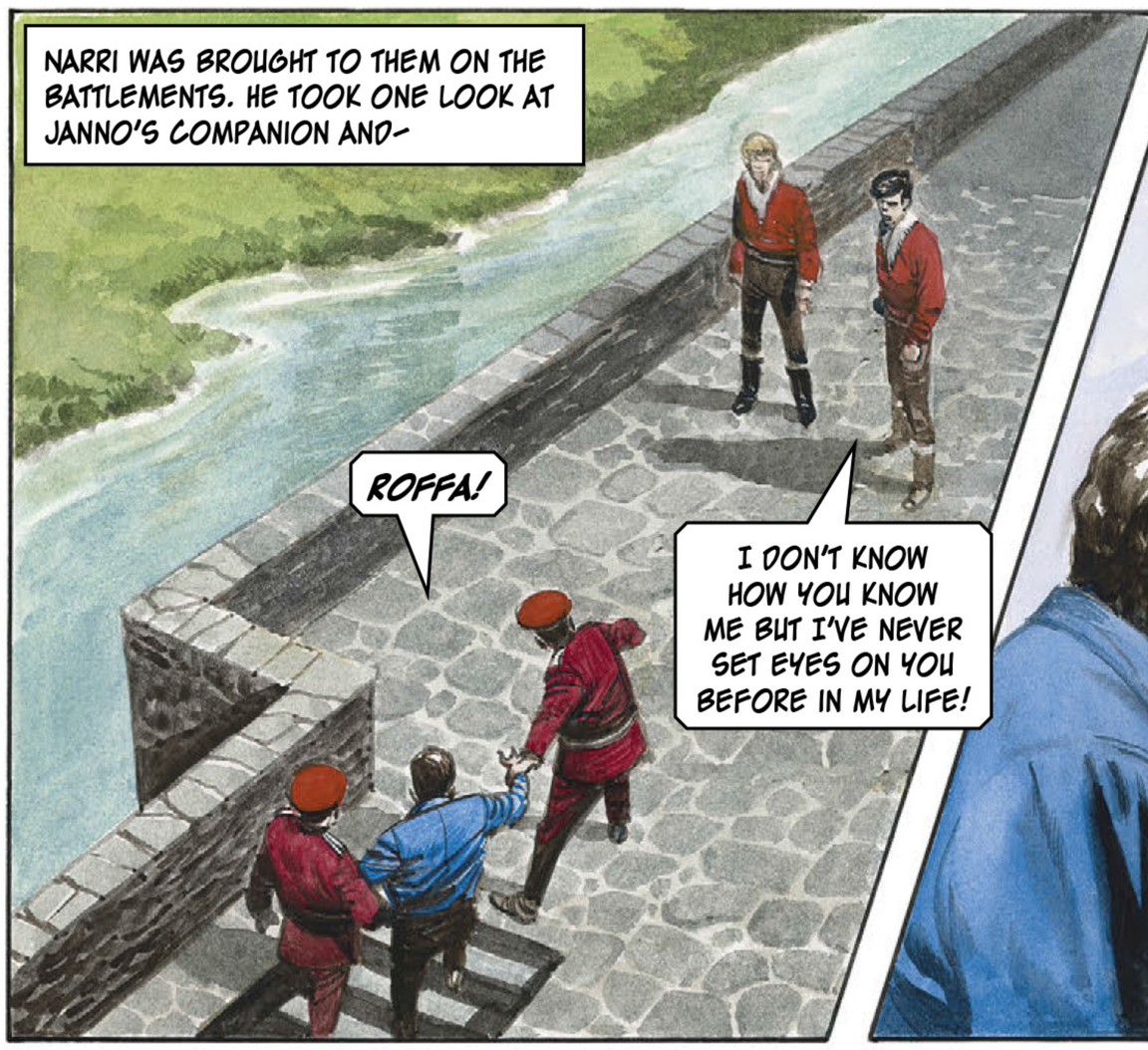
ROFFA GRINNED AT HIS COMRADE.
I WANT A WORD WITH YOU.
WHAT ABOUT?
ABOUT SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN INTO THE FUTURE!

BRIEFLY, JANNO TOLD NARRI'S STORY.
I THOUGHT NOTHING OF IT, YOU SEE, TILL I GOT MY UNCLE'S INVITATION TO THE SUMMER PALACE!
YES, I SEE THAT – BUT I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING...


OSSAN'S ARRANGED WHAT HE CALLS AN AIR DISPLAY TO TAKE PLACE OVER THE SUMMER PALACE – AND HE'S HAND-PICKED THE CREWS HIMSELF!
THAT CLINCHES IT! NARRI SAID THAT OSSAN'S SUPPORTERS WOULD BOMB THE PALACE!


THE TWO AIR FLEET PILOTS WENT TO THE DREAD PLACE WHERE NARRI WAS INCARCERATED.
WHAT AN AWFUL-LOOKING PLACE THIS IS.
IT'S WORSE INSIDE!

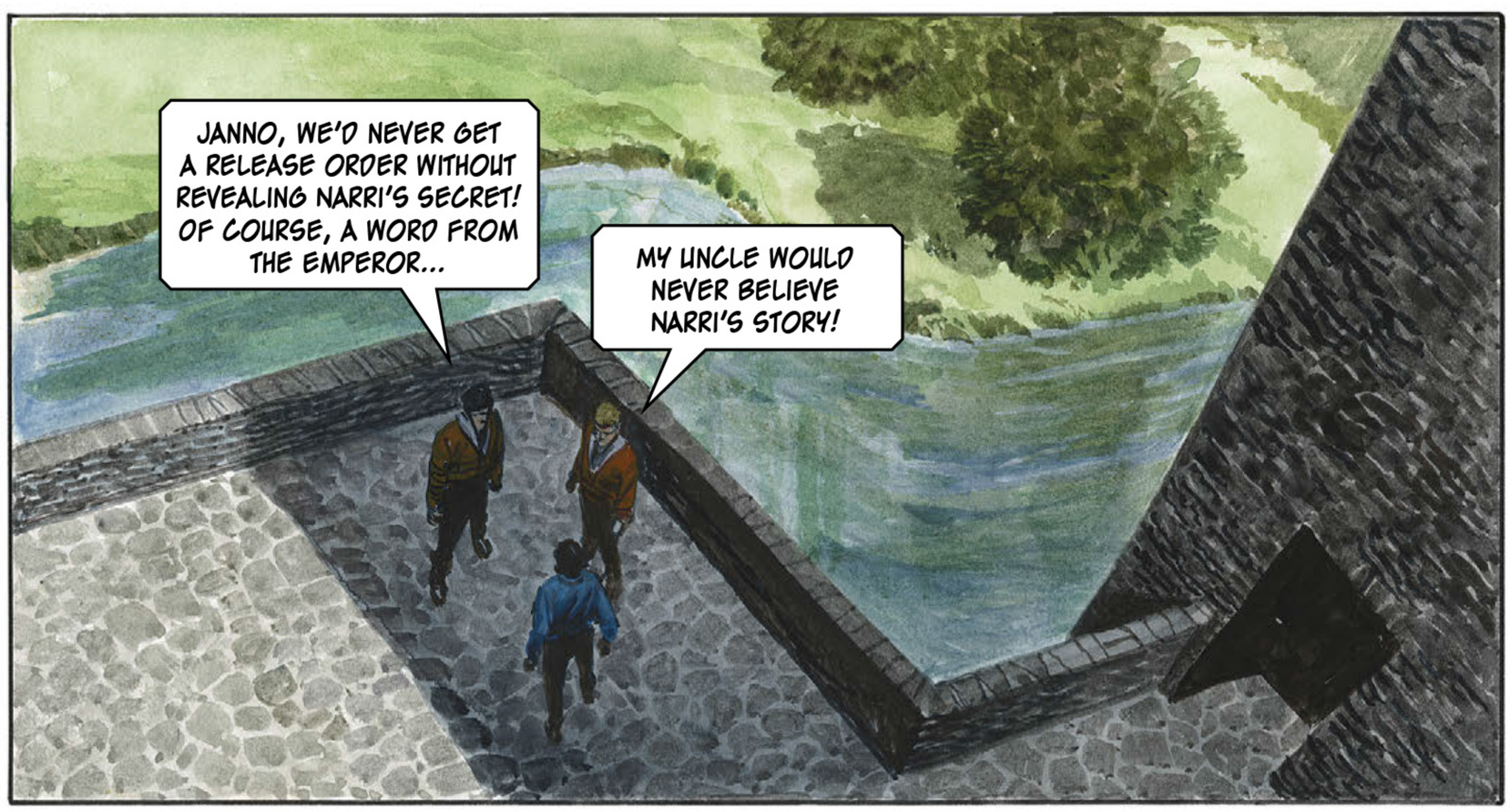

IT WAS JANNO'S SECOND VISIT. THE GOVERNOR WAS TRUCULENT AND SUSPICIOUS.
AYE, YOU CAN SEE HIM... BUT I CAN'T ALLOW HIM OUT OF HIS CELL WITHOUT PROPER AUTHORITY.
THE AUTHORITY OF THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU, FELLOW! HAVE HIM FETCHED AT ONCE.


NARRI WAS BROUGHT TO THEM ON THE BATTLEMENTS. HE TOOK ONE LOOK AT JANNO'S COMPANION AND-
ROFFA!
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU KNOW ME BUT I'VE NEVER SET EYES ON YOU BEFORE IN MY LIFE!

I MET YOU THREE YEARS IN THE FUTURE! YOU WERE THE LAST SURVIVOR OF THE TRIGAN RESISTANCE, LIVING IN A HOLE IN THE GROUND.
LAST SURVIVOR? LIVING IN A HOLE? THE FELLOW IS MAD AFTER ALL!

AND THEN... THE PROOF!
YOU HAVE A LARGE SCAR ON YOUR RIGHT SHOULDER!
HOW- HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

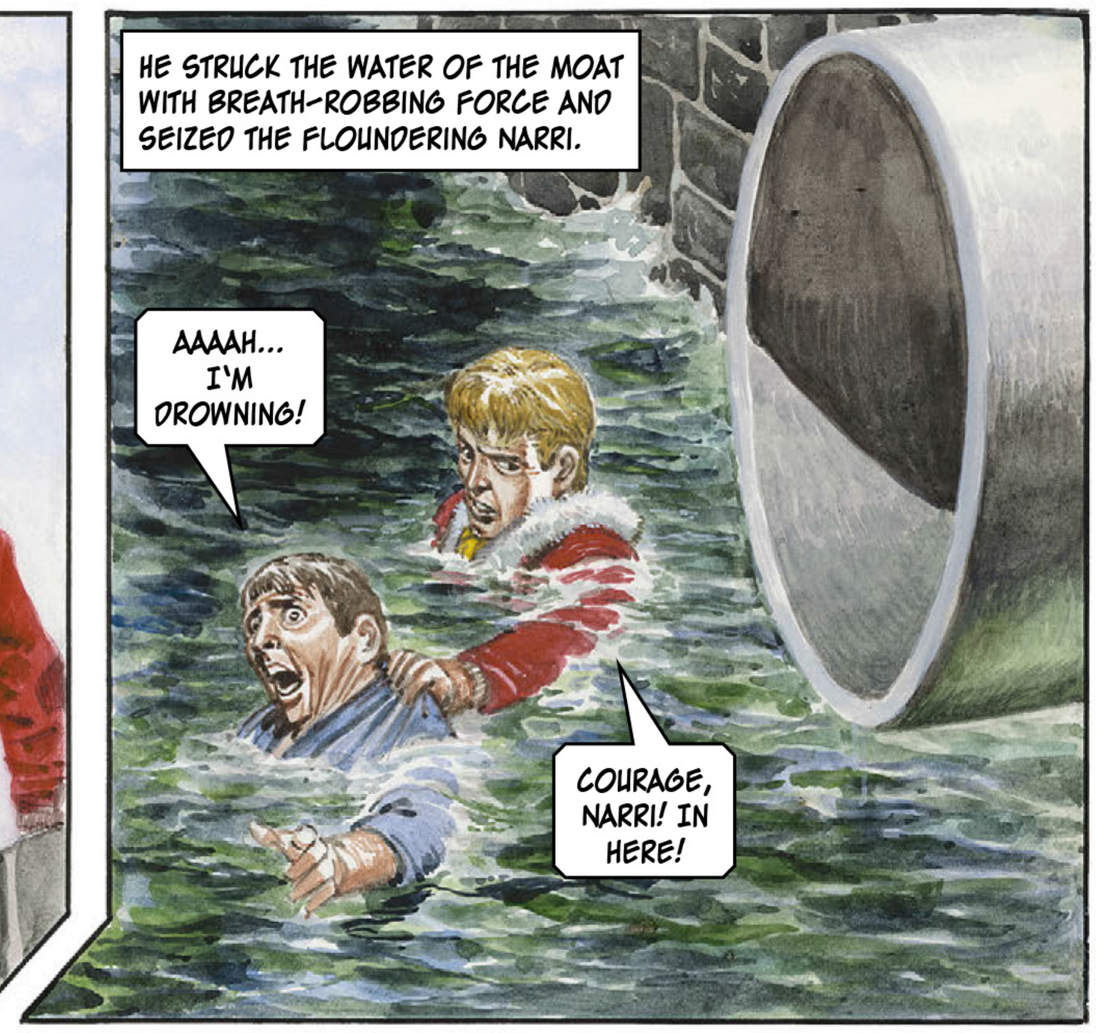
I'VE NEVER SHOWN ANYONE THE SCAR. ALWAYS BEEN SENSITIVE ABOUT IT. HOW COULD YOU KNOW?
YOU WERE LIVING LIKE AN ANIMAL, ROFFA, WITHOUT A SHIRT TO YOUR BACK!
THAT'S PROOF ENOUGH FOR ME! WE'VE GOT TO GET YOU RELEASED FROM THIS INFERNAL PLACE!


JANNO, WE'D NEVER GET A RELEASE ORDER WITHOUT REVEALING NARRI'S SECRET! OF COURSE, A WORD FROM THE EMPEROR...
MY UNCLE WOULD NEVER BELIEVE NARRI'S STORY!

THERE'S ONLY ONE THING FOR IT. NARRI! CAN YOU SWIM?
A LITTLE, LORD JANNO... BUT WHY?

JANNO ACTED!
OVER WITH YOU, THEN!
AAAARGH!

JANNO FOLLOWED NARRI OVER THE HIGH BATTLEMENTS – WITH A LAST WORD TO ROFFA.
YOU KNOW WHERE TO MEET US – TONIGHT!
RIGHT! GOOD LUCK!


HE STRUCK THE WATER OF THE MOAT WITH BREATH-ROBBING FORCE AND SEIZED THE FLOUNDERING NARRI.
AAAAH... I'M DROWNING!
COURAGE, NARRI! IN HERE!

THEY CRAWLED INTO THE DANK DARKNESS.
WHERE... WHERE DOES IT LEAD?
IT'S AN OVERFLOW FOR THE MOAT. IT PROBABLY COMES OUT AT THE RIVER BANK.

MEANWHILE, ROFFA HAD RAISED THE ALARM.
WHAT'S HAPPENED? WHERE'S THE PRISONER?
HE JUMPED FOR IT! LORD JANNO WENT AFTER HIM. HE'LL CATCH HIM, NEVER FEAR!

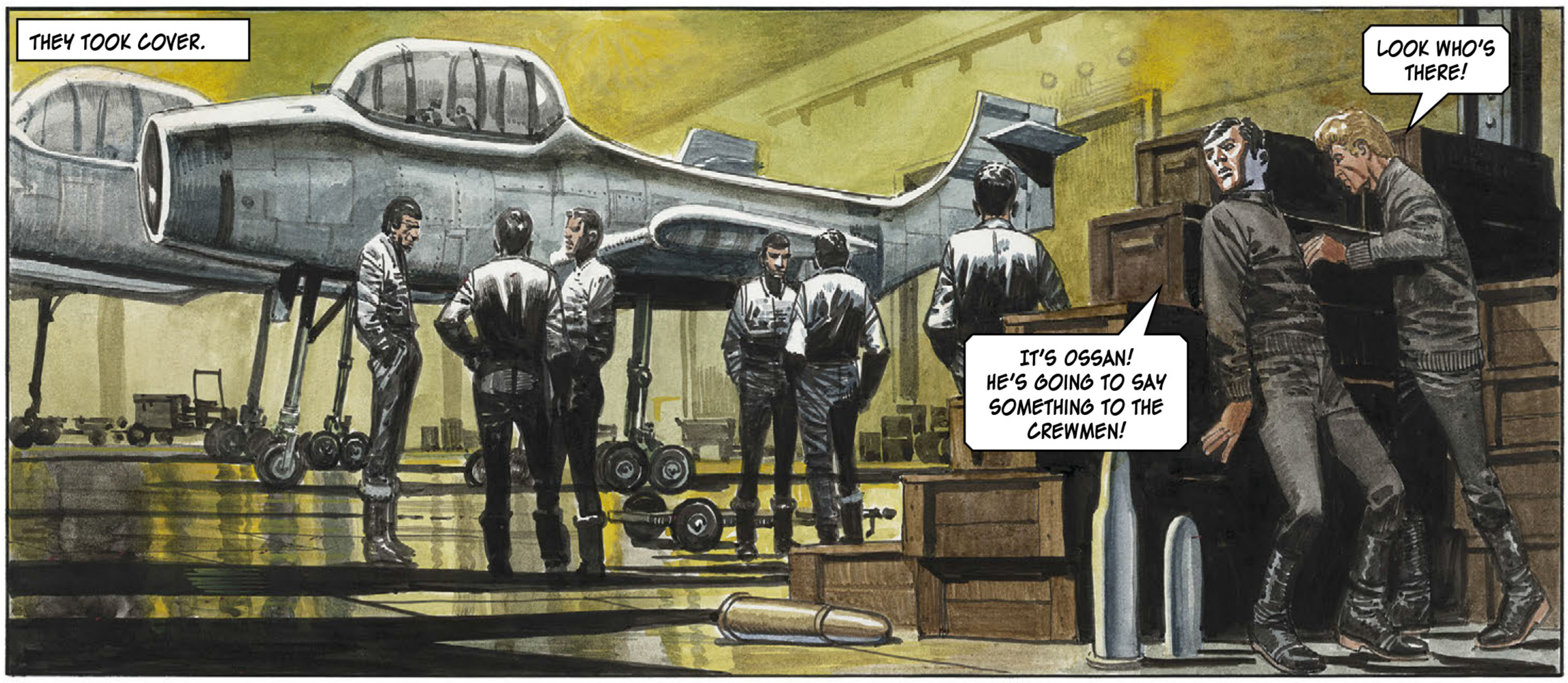
THAT NIGHT, ROFFA WENT TO JANNO'S APARTMENT – TO FIND HIS FRIEND AND NARRI ALREADY THERE.
IT WAS EASY. WE WERE HOME BEFORE DARK. I CONTACTED THE GOVERNOR AND TOLD HIM NARRI HAD GIVEN ME THE SLIP.
THERE WON'T BE MUCH FUSS. NARRI ISN'T IMPORTANT. THEY REGARD HIM AS A HARMLESS HALF-WIT.

WELL – WHAT DO WE DO TO SAVE THE EMPIRE?
IS THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO CHANGE THE FUTURE? NARRI SAW IT HAPPEN – ISN'T IT UNCHANGEABLE?

NARRI ANSWERED THEM.
THREE YEARS FROM NOW, I SAW A YOUNG TREE GROWING OUTSIDE MY HOUSE. THE OTHER DAY, I TORE IT OUT OF THE GROUND AS A SAPLING.
HERE IT IS! I HAVE KEPT IT CONCEALED UPON MY PERSON EVER SINCE! IT IS PROOF THAT WE CAN CHANGE COMING EVENTS.

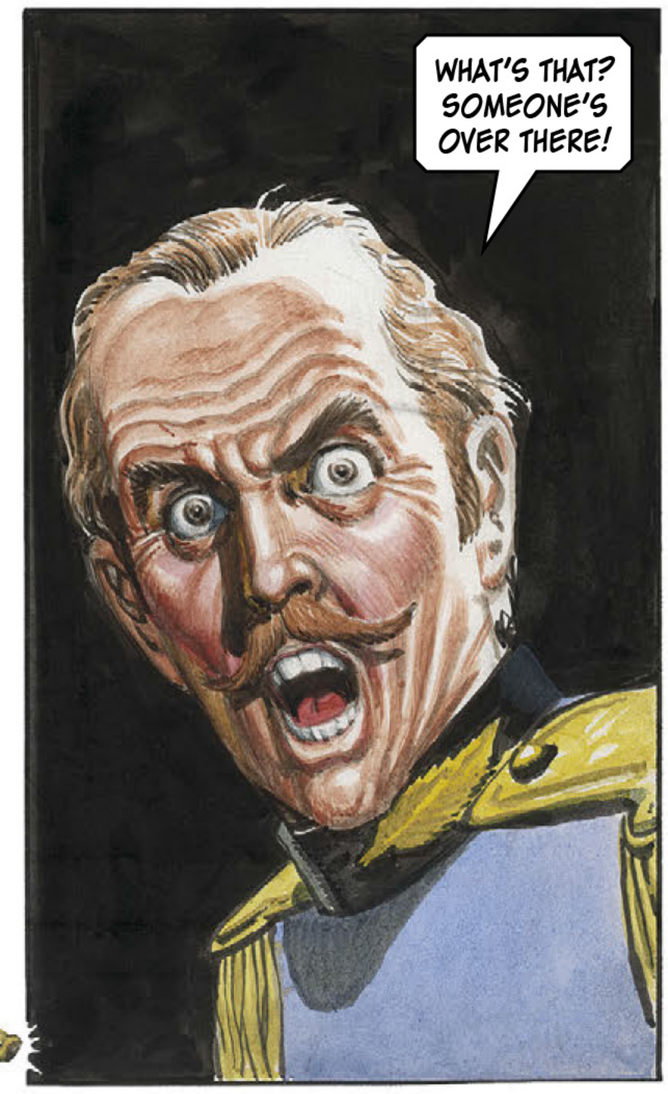
THEIR SPIRITS ROSE.
THE THREE BOMBERS THAT ARE DUE TO ATTACK THE PALACE ARE ALREADY ARMED AND FUELLED!
THEN WE'LL SABOTAGE THOSE BOMBERS! THEY'LL NEVER REACH THEIR TARGET!

LATER THAT NIGHT, TWO BLACK-GARBED FIGURES CREPT TOWARDS THE AIR FLEET BOMBING BASE.


THEY TOOK COVER.
LOOK WHO'S THERE!
IT'S OSSAN! HE'S GOING TO SAY SOMETHING TO THE CREWMEN!

MARSHAL OSSAN ADDRESSED THE PILOTS AND BOMBARDIERS OF THE THREE CRAFT.
YOU KNOW YOUR ORDERS, GENTLEMEN! LET THERE BE NO MISTAKES! AT MIDDAY PRECISELY, YOU WILL MAKE A LOW-LEVEL RUN OVER THE IMPERIAL SUMMER PALACE...

IT WAS IN THAT INSTANT THAT ROFFA'S FOOT KNOCKED AGAINST A CASE OF AMMUNITION!

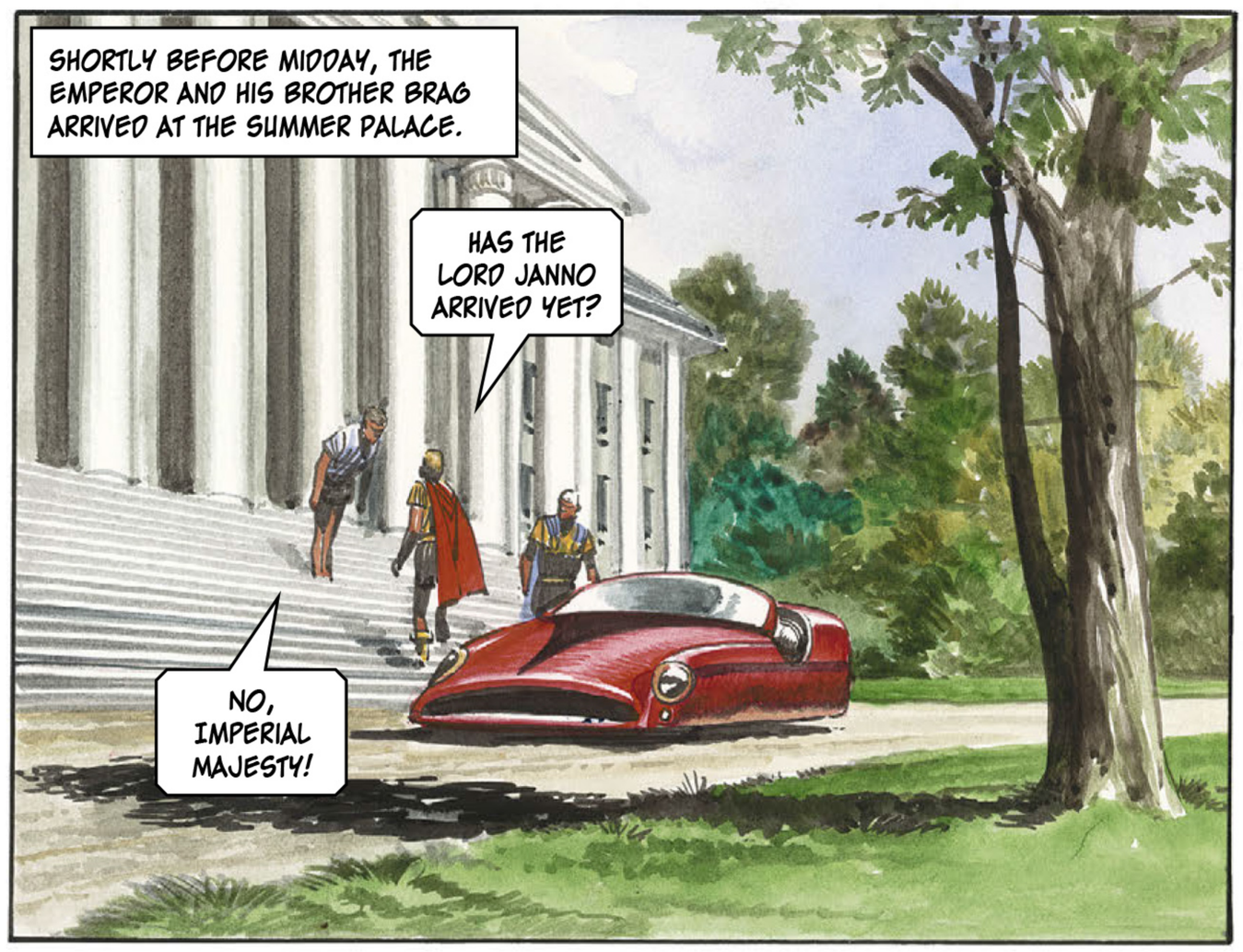

WHAT'S THAT? SOMEONE'S OVER THERE!

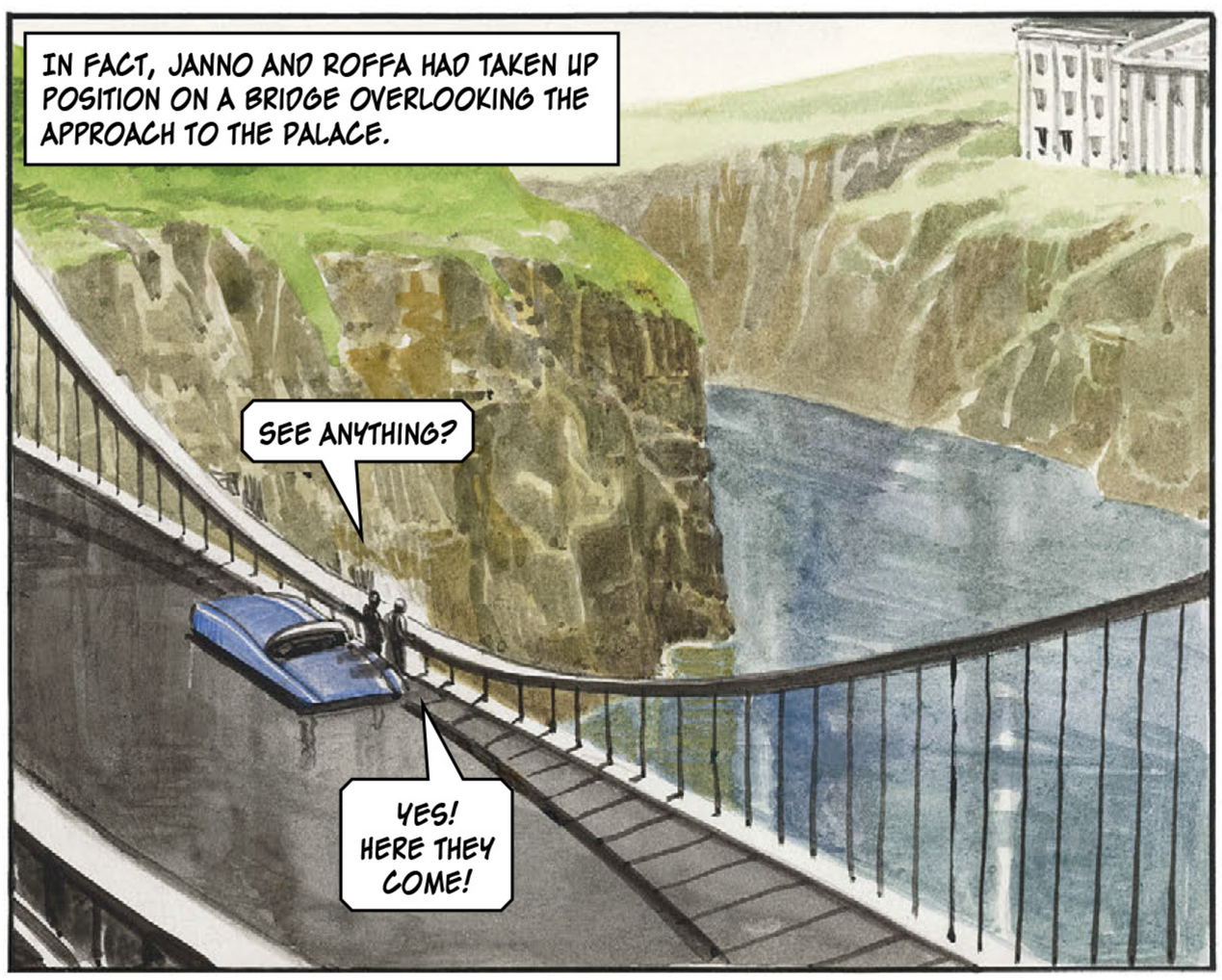
AT THAT MOMENT, A SMALL FORM SCURRIED OUT FROM BEHIND THE AMMUNITION DUMP.
HA! THAT'S WHAT MADE THE NOISE!

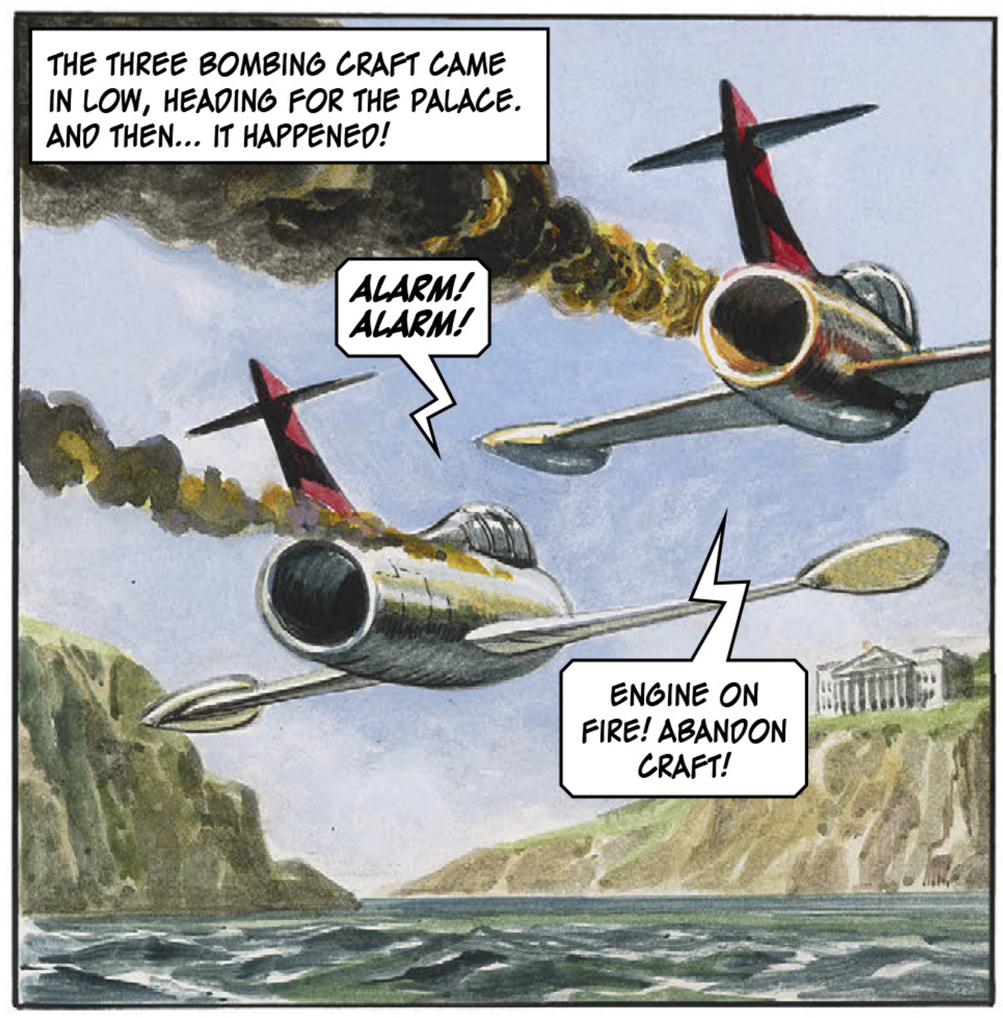
MARSHAL OSSAN CONTINUED HIS REMARKS.
AS I WAS SAYING, GENTLEMEN, YOU KNOW YOUR ORDERS. I SHALL BE WATCHING AT MIDDAY AND I KNOW I CAN TRUST YOU TO DO YOUR DUTY! GOOD LUCK! AIM STRAIGHT AND TRUE!

WHEN THE MARSHAL AND THE CREWMEN HAD GONE, JANNO AND ROFFA CREPT FROM THEIR HIDING PLACE.
I DON'T LIKE SABOTAGE! DO THOSE FELLOWS HAVE TO PERISH WITH THEIR CRAFT?
NO! IT'S NOT NECESSARY...

I'M FIXING THE ELECTRONICS SO THAT THE CREWMEN WILL HAVE SUFFICIENT WARNING OF DISASTER!

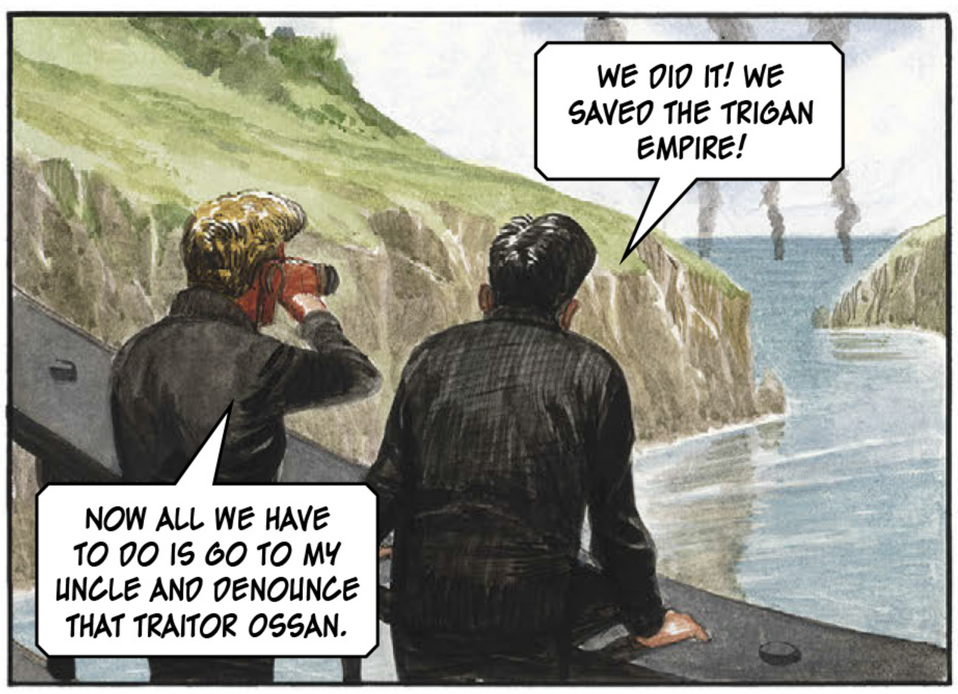

SHORTLY BEFORE MIDDAY, THE EMPEROR AND HIS BROTHER BRAG ARRIVED AT THE SUMMER PALACE.
HAS THE LORD JANNO ARRIVED YET?
NO, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!

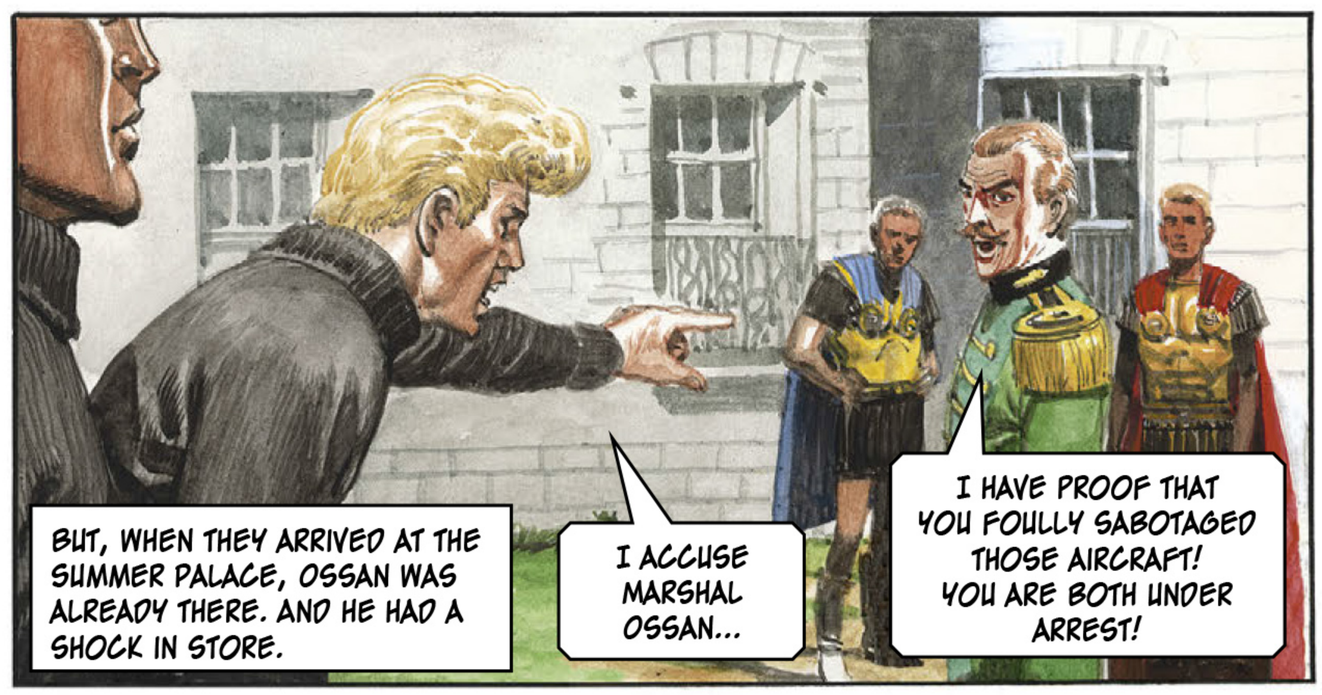

IN FACT, JANNO AND ROFFA HAD TAKEN UP POSITION ON A BRIDGE OVERLOOKING THE APPROACH TO THE PALACE.
SEE ANYTHING?
YES! HERE THEY COME!


THE THREE BOMBING CRAFT CAME IN LOW, HEADING FOR THE PALACE. AND THEN... IT HAPPENED!
ALARM! ALARM!
ENGINE ON FIRE! ABANDON CRAFT!

THE CREWMEN ESCAPED!
WATCH THIS! WHEN THE BOMBS EXPLODE, ALL TRIGAN WILL KNOW THAT THEY WERE ARMED FOR AN OFFENSIVE MISSION!

THE CRAFT CRASHED – SPECTACULARLY!


WE DID IT! WE SAVED THE TRIGAN EMPIRE!
NOW ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS GO TO MY UNCLE AND DENOUNCE THAT TRAITOR OSSAN.


BUT, WHEN THEY ARRIVED AT THE SUMMER PALACE, OSSAN WAS ALREADY THERE. AND HE HAD A SHOCK IN STORE.
I ACCUSE MARSHAL OSSAN...
I HAVE PROOF THAT YOU FOULLY SABOTAGED THOSE AIRCRAFT! YOU ARE BOTH UNDER ARREST!

JANNO APPEALED IN VAIN TO THE EMPEROR.
UNCLE! THAT WAS NO AIR DISPLAY! THOSE CRAFT CARRIED BOMBS!
HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY WAS WELL AWARE THAT THE FLY-PAST WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY TARGET BOMBING IN THE SEA! TAKE THEM AWAY!

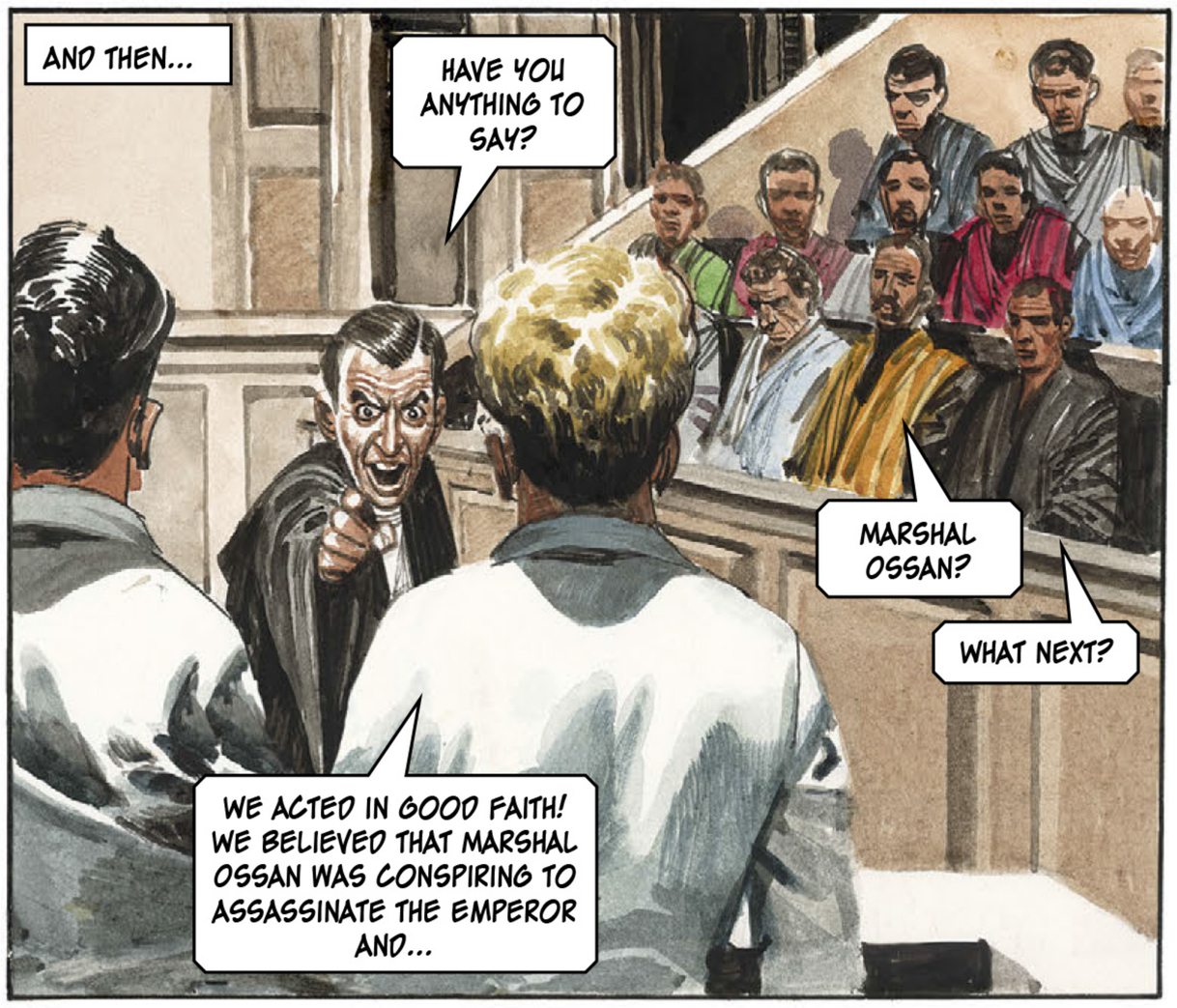
LATER – IN THE DANK DUNGEON – THE TWO COMRADES FACED UP TO AN AWFUL POSSIBILITY...
WHAT WENT WRONG?
JANNO! SUPPOSING NARRI'S A FAKE AFTER ALL? SUPPOSING OSSAN'S INNOCENT?

AFTER WHAT SEEMED LIKE AN ETERNITY, JANNO AND ROFFA WERE SUMMONED FROM THEIR INFERNAL DUNGEON.
OUT OF IT, YOU TWO! TODAY YOU FACE TRIAL!

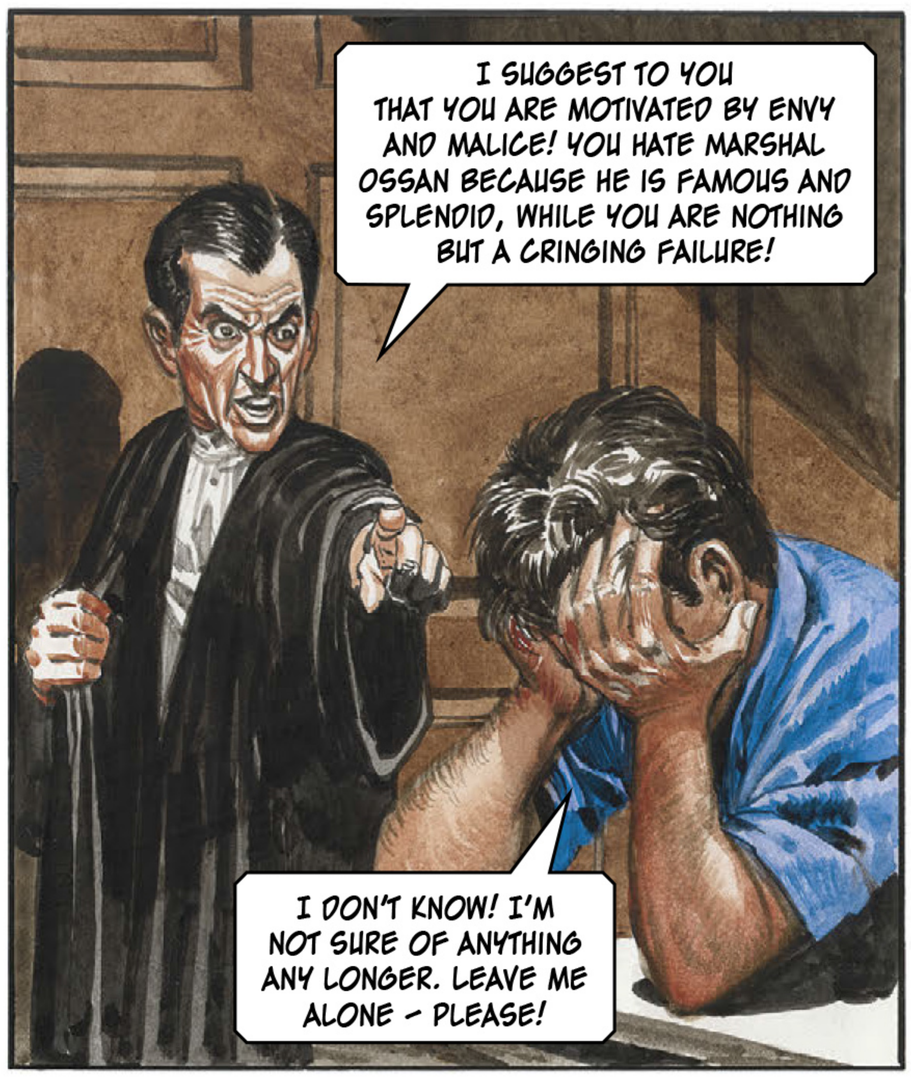
THEIR TRIAL WAS HELD IN THE GREAT COURT OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE AND THE EMPEROR HIMSELF WAS PRESIDING JUDGE.
YOU ARE BOTH ACCUSED OF FOULLY CONSPIRING TO SABOTAGE THREE BOMBING CRAFT OF THE IMPERIAL TRIGAN AIR FLEET. DENIAL IS USELESS – YOUR ACTION WAS RECORDED ON THE SECURITY DEVICE...

PROJECTED ON A GIANT SCREEN, THEY SAW AND HEARD THEMSELVES AS THEY HAD BEEN ON THE FATEFUL NIGHT – CAPTURED BY A HIDDEN CAMERA.
...I'M FIXING THE ELEC-TRONICS...

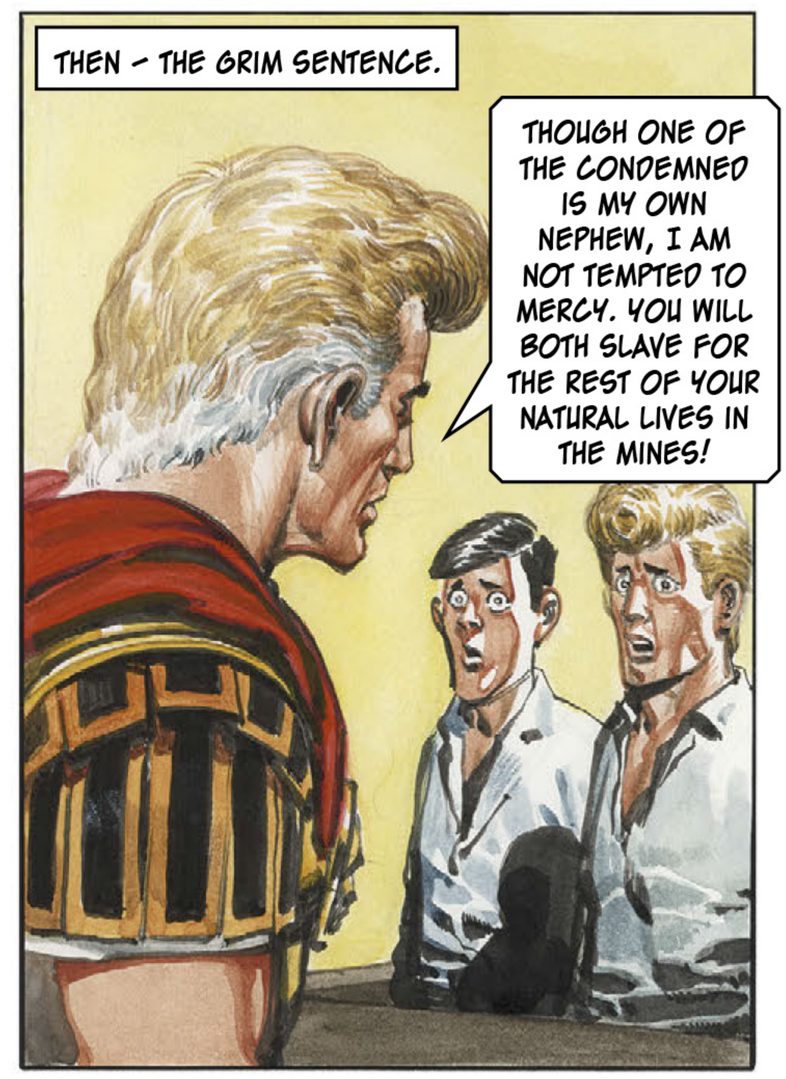
MOST DAMNING OF ALL – THERE WAS A NEWSREEL OF THE DISASTER THEY HAD CAUSED.


AND THEN...
HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO SAY?
MARSHAL OSSAN?
WHAT NEXT?
WE ACTED IN GOOD FAITH! WE BELIEVED THAT MARSHAL OSSAN WAS CONSPIRING TO ASSASSINATE THE EMPEROR AND...

NARRI WAS CALLED AS A DEFENCE WITNESS. THE POOR WRETCH WAS CUT TO PIECES BY THE ASTUTE PROSECUTOR.
SO YOU WENT INTO THE FUTURE, DID YOU? AND YOU SAW MARSHAL OSSAN RIDING AROUND IN A BIG CAR AS THE DICTATOR OF TRIGAN?
YES, I DID... AT LEAST, I THINK I DID...
THE FELLOW'S MAD!
HE SHOULD BE LOCKED UP!


I SUGGEST TO YOU THAT YOU ARE MOTIVATED BY ENVY AND MALICE! YOU HATE MARSHAL OSSAN BECAUSE HE IS FAMOUS AND SPLENDID, WHILE YOU ARE NOTHING BUT A CRINGING FAILURE!
I DON'T KNOW! I'M NOT SURE OF ANYTHING ANY LONGER. LEAVE ME ALONE – PLEASE!

IT WAS THEN THAT THE EMPEROR INTERVENED.
ENOUGH OF THIS NONSENSE! I'LL NOT HAVE THE IMPERIAL COURT OF JUSTICE MOCKED BY SUCH RUBBISH! THE CASE IS PROVED!


THEN – THE GRIM SENTENCE.
THOUGH ONE OF THE CONDEMNED IS MY OWN NEPHEW, I AM NOT TEMPTED TO MERCY. YOU WILL BOTH SLAVE FOR THE REST OF YOUR NATURAL LIVES IN THE MINES!

CHAINS WERE HAMMERED ON TO THE TWO YOUTHS IN PREPARATION FOR THE LIVING DEATH TO WHICH THEY HAD BEEN DOOMED. MARSHAL OSSAN LOOKED ON.
BEFORE THEY ARE TAKEN AWAY, I SHOULD LIKE A PRIVATE WORD WITH THE PRISONER JANNO.

JANNO HAD HAD HIS DOUBTS BUT OSSAN SOON SWEPT THEM AWAY!
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU REALLY DISCOVERED MY PLANS, JANNO, BUT I'D LIKE YOU TO KNOW THAT THE SECOND ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT IS PLANNED FOR TOMORROW – AND THIS ONE WILL SUCCEED!

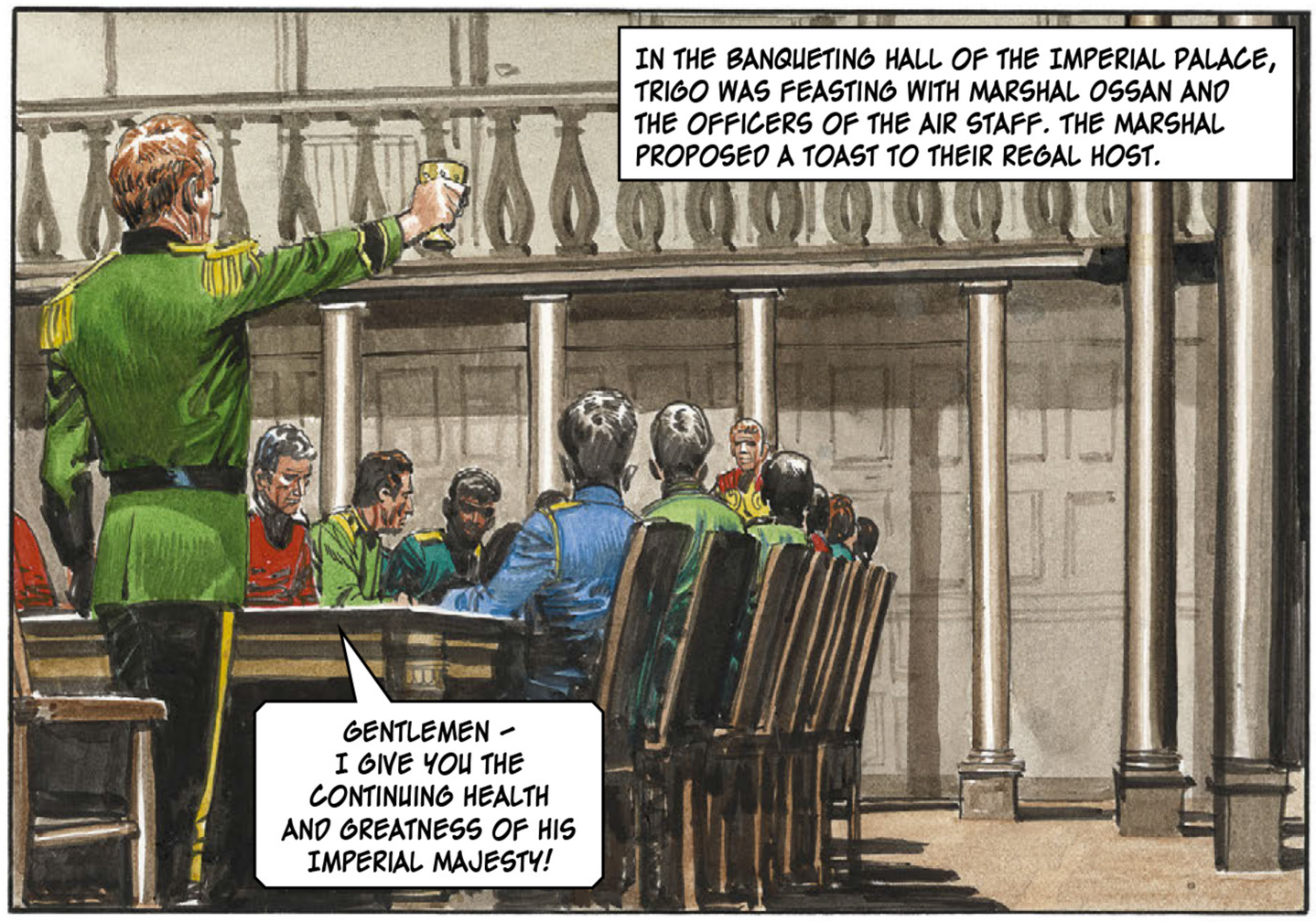
NARRI WAS RIGHT! TRAITOR! ASSASSIN! TYRANT!
AAAAGH! GUARDS – HELP ME! STRIKE HIM DOWN!

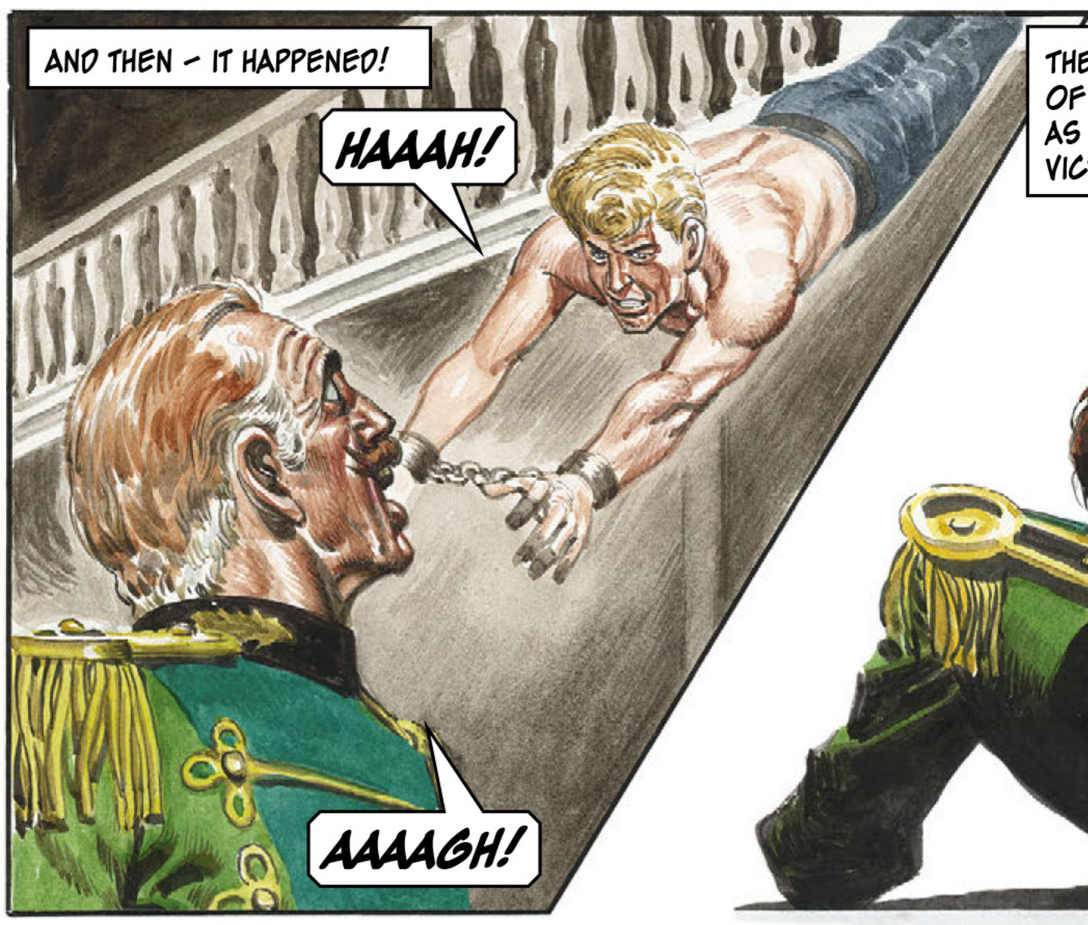
THERE'S FURTHER PROOF OF THE EVIL IN HIM. TAKE THE WRETCH AWAY! TAKE THEM BOTH TO THE MINES!

LATER, IN THE DEPTHS OF THE DREAD MINES, JANNO SWUNG WITH HIS HEAVY CHAIN AND FELLED A GUARD.
CONVICT ON THE LOOSE! SHOOT HIM DOWN!

NO! LET HIM GO! YOU KNOW THE SPECIAL ORDER FROM THE PALACE!

JANNO GOT CLEAR OF THE MINES, SCARCELY ABLE TO BELIEVE HIS LUCK...
WILL I BE IN TIME? WILL I...?


IN THE BANQUETING HALL OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE, TRIGO WAS FEASTING WITH MARSHAL OSSAN AND THE OFFICERS OF THE AIR STAFF. THE MARSHAL PROPOSED A TOAST TO THEIR REGAL HOST.
GENTLEMEN – I GIVE YOU THE CONTINUING HEALTH AND GREATNESS OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY!

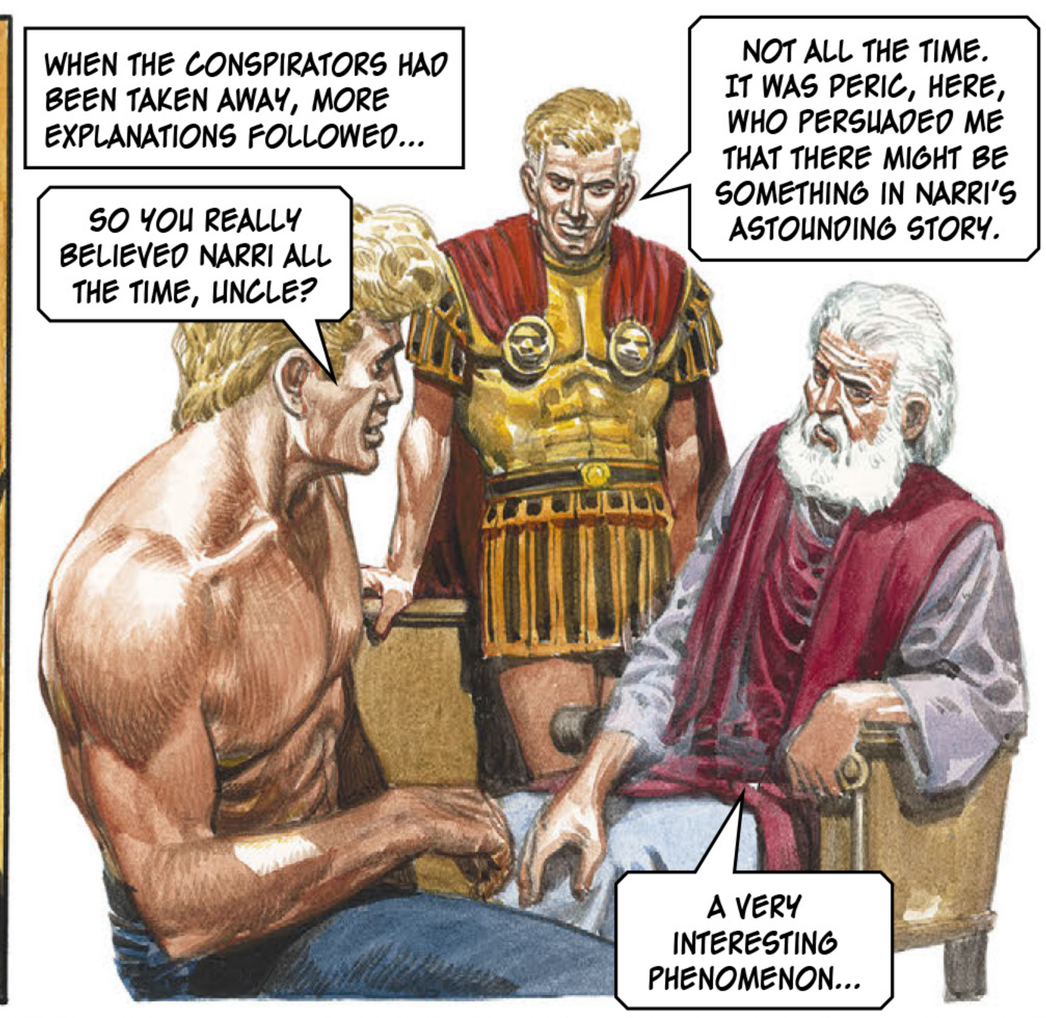

AND THEN – IT HAPPENED!
HAAAH!
AAAAGH!

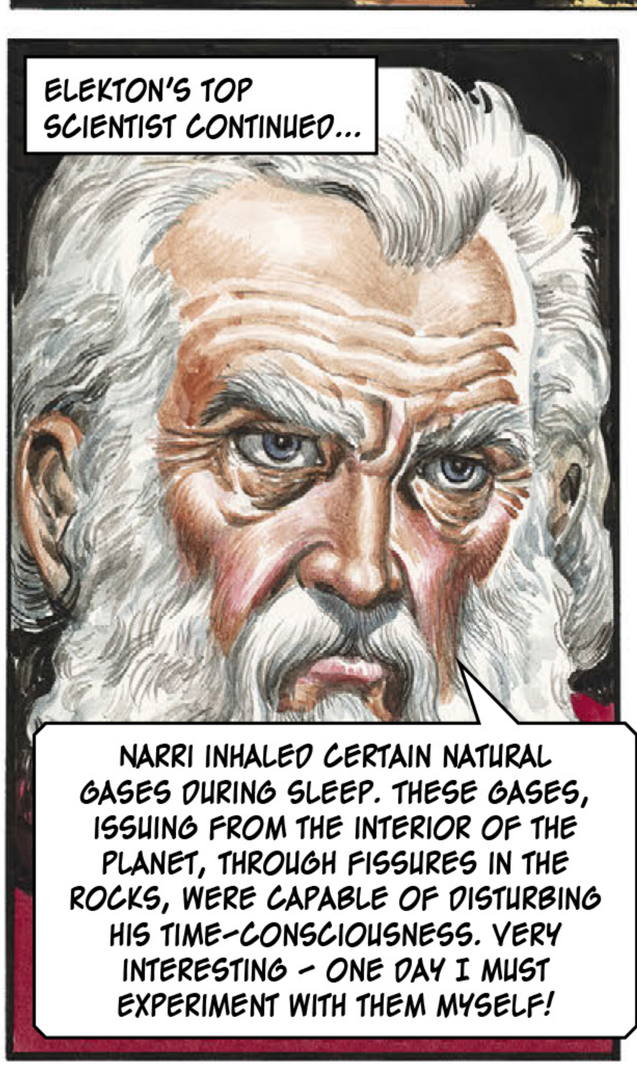
THERE WAS A MOMENT OF PANDEMONIUM AS JANNO BORE HIS VICTIM TO THE FLOOR.
THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!
HE CARRIED A HIDDEN WEAPON! I BET ALL THE TRAITOROUS DEMONS ARE CARRYING HIDDEN WEAPONS!

JANNO WAS RIGHT. AND MARSHAL OSSAN KNEW THAT THE TIME HAD COME TO STRIKE...
OPEN FIRE – DESTROY TRIGO AND THIS INTERFERING BRAT!

AND THEN – AT A SIGNAL FROM THE EMPEROR – THE GALLERY WAS THICK WITH ARMED GUARDS!
DROP YOUR WEAPONS! PLACE YOUR HANDS ON YOUR HEADS!

ASTOUNDED, JANNO STARED INTO THE SMILING FACE OF HIS UNCLE.
YOU... YOU KNEW ALL THE TIME?
YES, LAD. BUT THE WORD OF A MAN WHO HAS BEEN INTO THE FUTURE IS NO PROOF IN TRIGAN LAW. I HAD TO LET OSSAN CONDEMN HIMSELF!


WHEN THE CONSPIRATORS HAD BEEN TAKEN AWAY, MORE EXPLANATIONS FOLLOWED...
SO YOU REALLY BELIEVED NARRI ALL THE TIME, UNCLE?
NOT ALL THE TIME. IT WAS PERIC, HERE, WHO PERSUADED ME THAT THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING IN NARRI'S ASTOUNDING STORY.
A VERY INTERESTING PHENOMENON...


ELEKTON'S TOP SCIENTIST CONTINUED...
NARRI INHALED CERTAIN NATURAL GASES DURING SLEEP. THESE GASES, ISSUING FROM THE INTERIOR OF THE PLANET, THROUGH FISSURES IN THE ROCKS, WERE CAPABLE OF DISTURBING HIS TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS. VERY INTERESTING – ONE DAY I MUST EXPERIMENT WITH THEM MYSELF!

NO WONDER I FOUND IT EASY TO ESCAPE!
YOUR ESCAPE WAS, SHALL WE SAY, FACILITATED! I WANTED YOU TO BE IN AT THE KILL! YOU DESERVED IT, AFTER WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH FOR THE TRIGAN FAMILY.

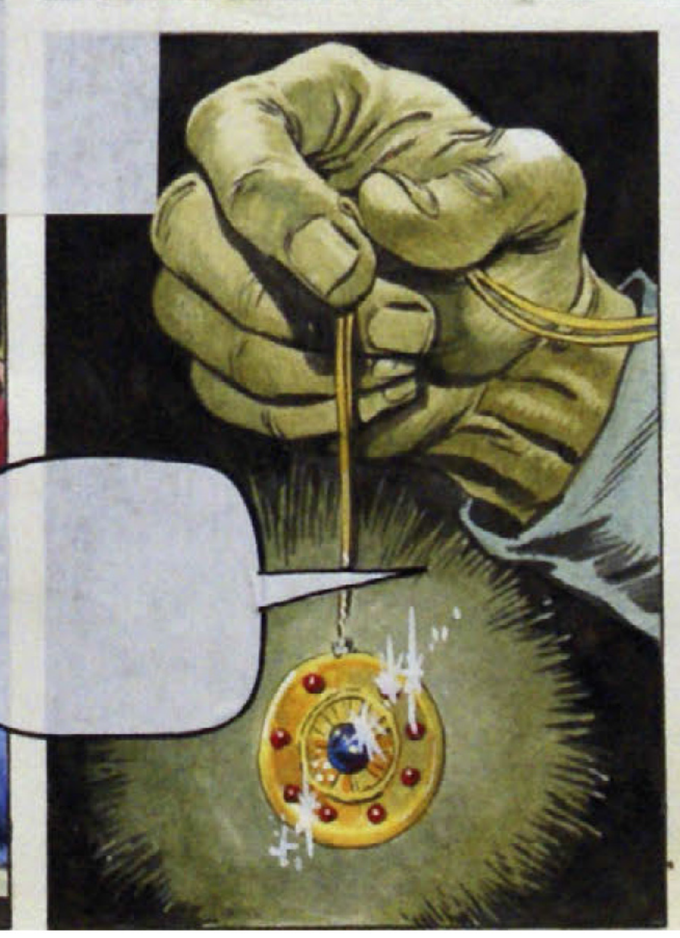
NARRI WAS REWARDED BY A POST IN THE IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, WHERE HE FREQUENTLY MET HIS FORMER COMRADES-IN-ADVERSITY, JANNO AND ROFFA...
AND YOU MEAN TO TELL ME THAT, WHEN YOU WERE IN THE FUTURE, YOU NEVER FOUND OUT WHICH KREED WON THE TRIGAN EMPIRE HANDICAP TOMORROW?
SORRY, ROFFA, I'VE FORGOTTEN ITS NAME. I'M NOT A GAMBLING MAN.

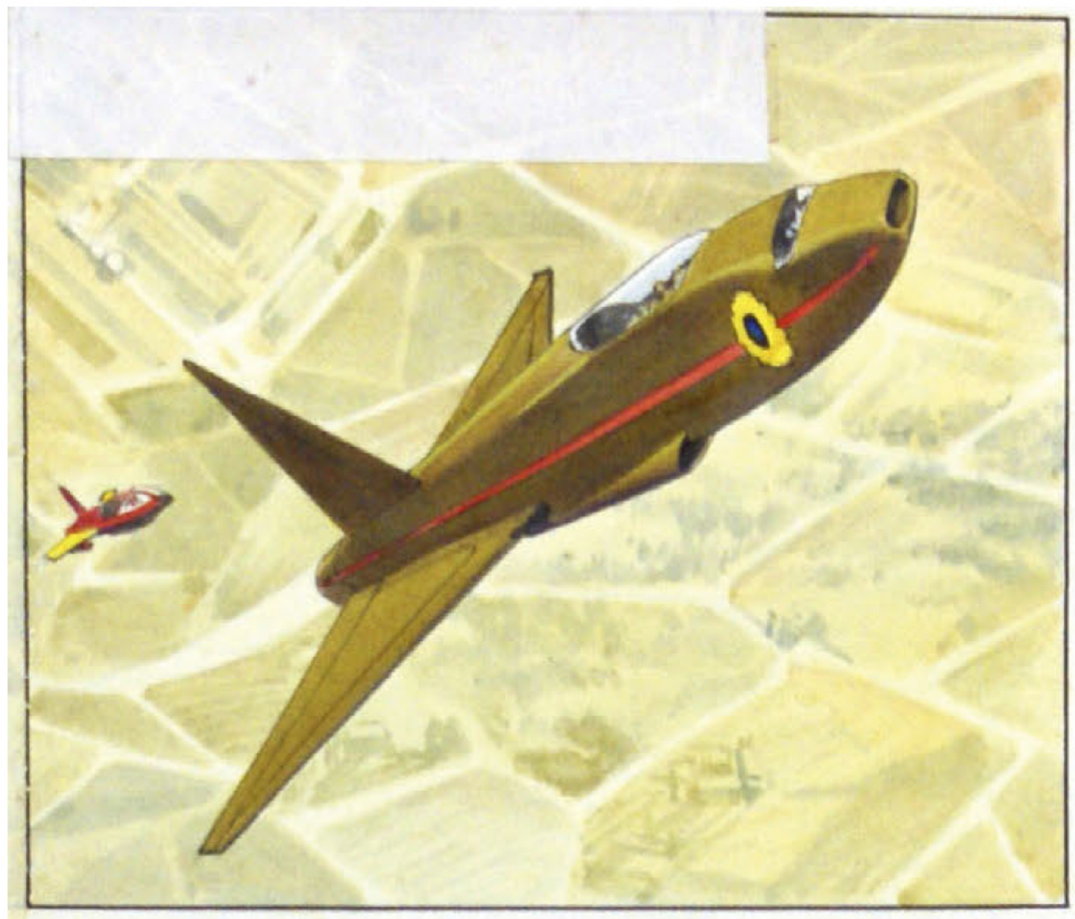
BONUS MATERIAL

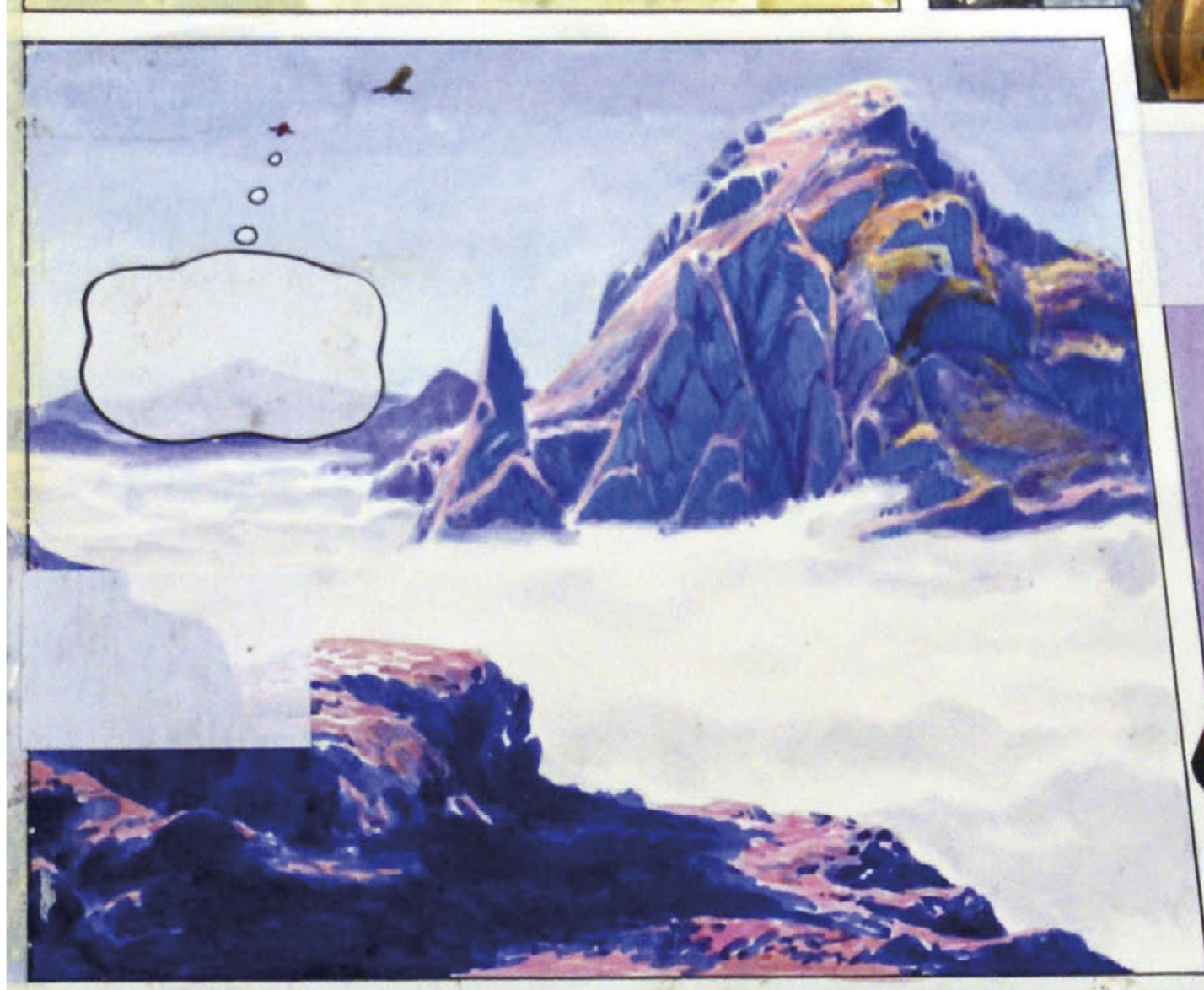
ORIGINAL ART

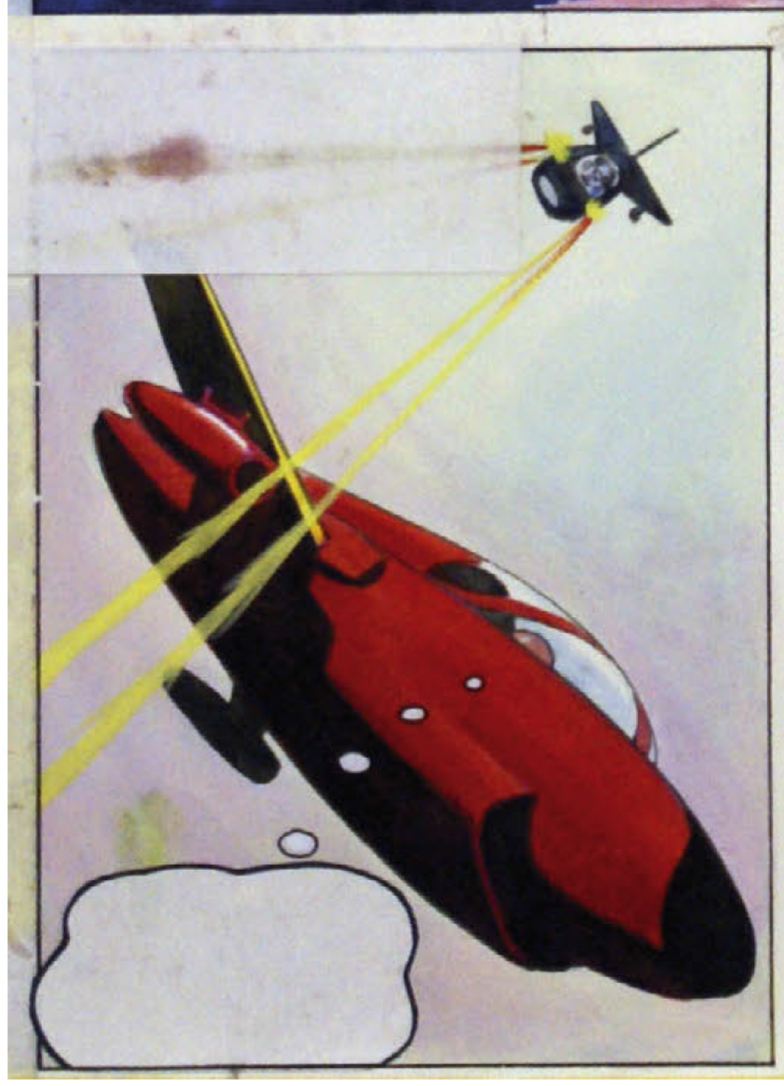
BY MIGUEL QUESADA

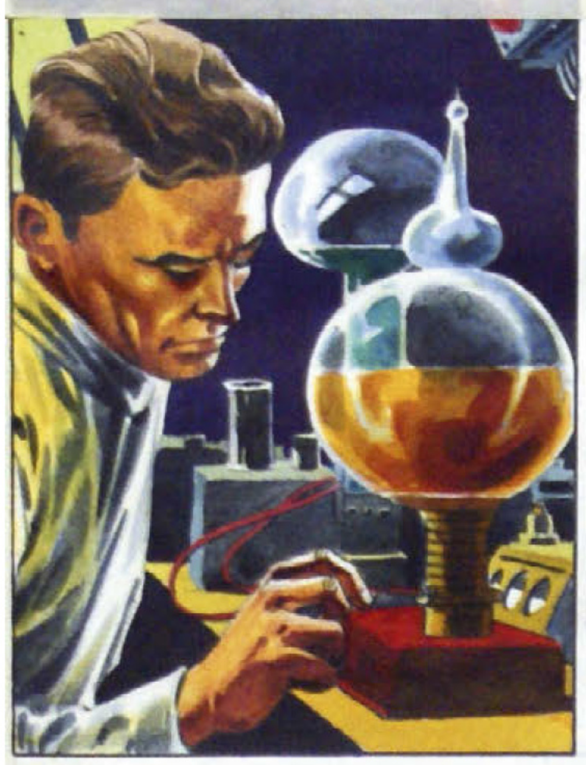
AAAARGH!

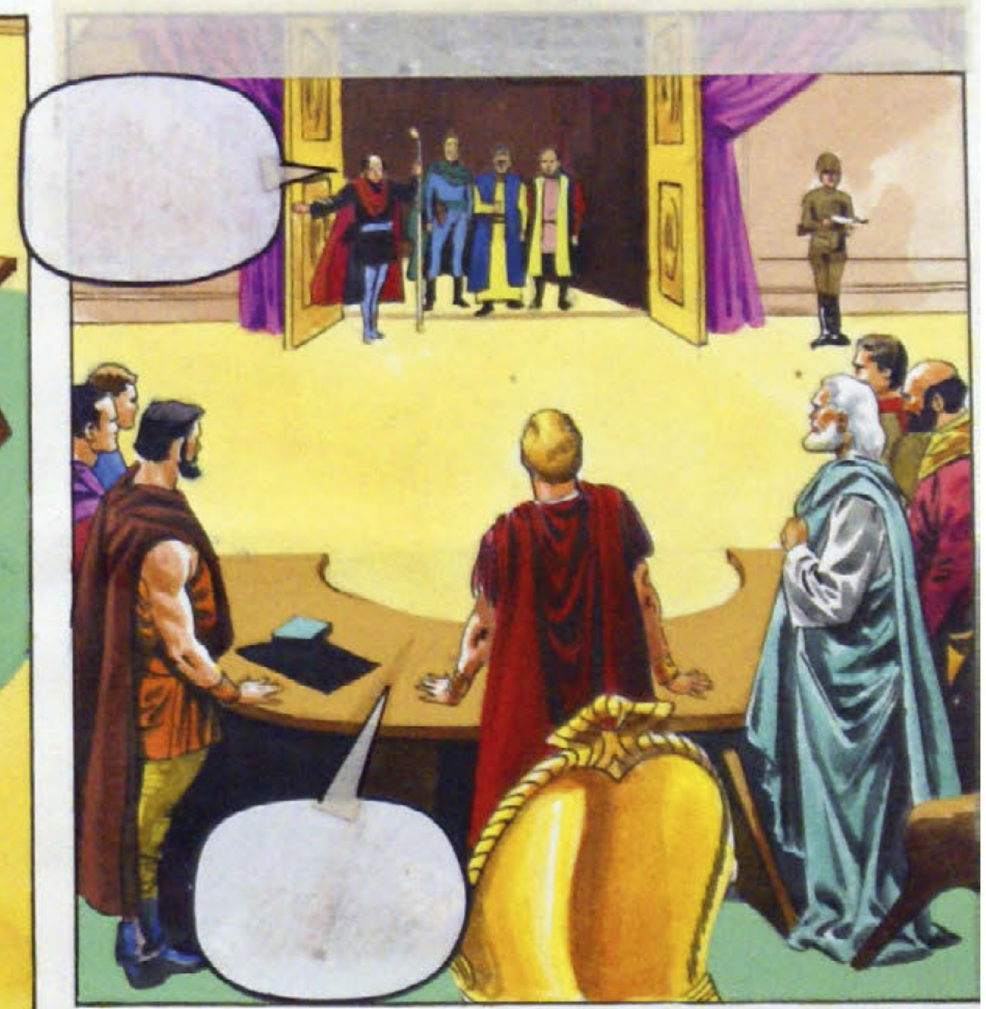












ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MIKE BUTTERWORTH

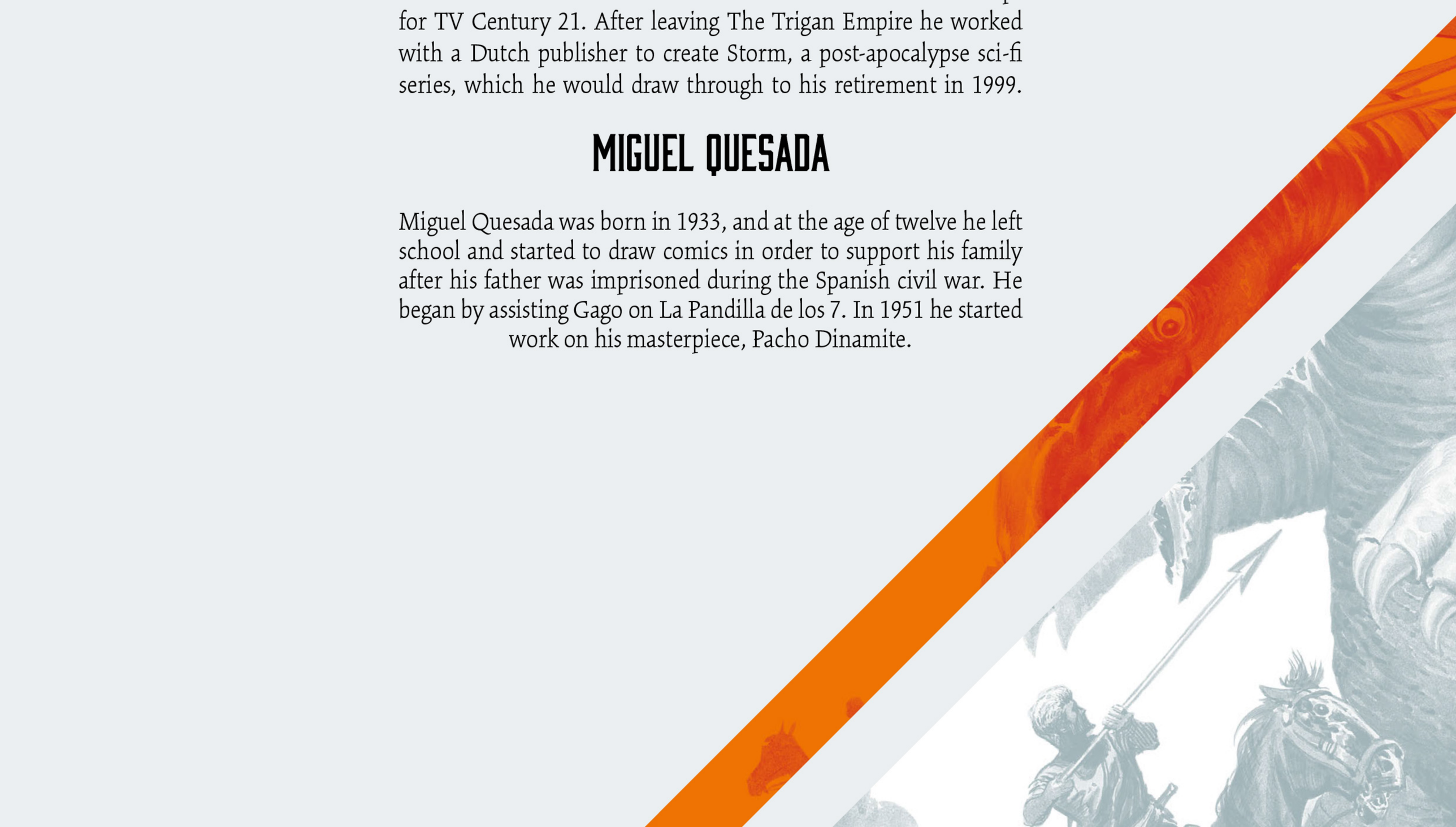
Mike Butterworth is primarily known in comic circles as the writer of The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire, but had previously written Battler Britton and Buffalo Bill strips for Comet, for Sun he wrote Max Bravo, The Happy Hussar and Billy the Kid (which was drawn by, amongst others, Don Lawrence). The Trigan Empire began in 1965 in Ranger, and continued when Ranger was absorbed into Look and Learn where it continued to be published through to 1982. From 1967 he also wrote crime novels under his full name, John Michael Butterworth, and gothic romances under the pseudonyms of Carola Salisbury and Sarah Kemp.

DON LAWRENCE

Don Lawrence was born in 1928, and worked for Mick Anglo on the Marvelman comic produced for Amalgamated Press, and then Billy the Kid in the comic Sun. When Sun was absorbed into Lion he moved on to illustrating Olac the Gladiator, Karl the Viking and Maroc the Mighty. In 1965 he teamed with Mike Butterworth to create The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire for Ranger magazine, and continued to paint the comic through its transition into Look and Learn through to 1976. During this period he also worked on Fireball XL5 and The Adventures of Tarzan comic strips for TV Century 21. After leaving The Trigan Empire he worked with a Dutch publisher to create Storm, a post-apocalypse sci-fi series, which he would draw through to his retirement in 1999.

MIGUEL QUESADA

Miguel Quesada was born in 1933, and at the age of twelve he left school and started to draw comics in order to support his family after his father was imprisoned during the Spanish civil war. He began by assisting Gago on La Pandilla de los 7. In 1951 he started work on his masterpiece, Pacho Dinamite.



AN EMPIRE BESIEGED! AN EMPIRE RESILIENT!

The third stunning omnibus of the best selling and long out of print sci-fi series, The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire.

These stories were written and painted in the early seventies, when Don Lawrence was at his peak of his creative abilities. Included in this volume is the never before reprinted Doran the Hypnotist, painted by Miguel Quesada, ensuring that all the stories originally published between November 1970 and February 1973 are published in this collection.

The Emperor Trigo and his nephew Janno continue to thwart all plots and schemes that are intended to bring down the Trigan Empire, from the Rallu Invasion to more insidious internal machinations. The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire "dominated the genre of the Science Fiction epics" (Independent) and its influence can now be seen by a new generation of readers.

"I love Trigan Empire! It's absolutely epic."
DUNCAN JONES

"Don [Lawrence] painted a comic I loved. It was called the Trigan Empire – two comic pages a week, in the children's magazine "Look and Learn", which even schools who banned comics allowed"
NEIL GAIMAN

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